WRITING AND SELLING A PLAY

FANNY CANNON

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PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BEGINNER

BY

FANNY CANNON

pseud
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"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance."
—POPE.

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To all those writers whose plays the author has read and criticised, and whose questions and difficulties have been her inspiration, this book is dedicated

PREFACE

During my work as critic of play-manuscripts, the efforts, with very few exceptions, of novices in the art of play-writing, I have frequently been asked why there has been no book written which really answered the many problems of the beginner. That critics of play-manuscripts are so often asked this same question proves that the books already before the public do not entirely fill the need, either because of their nature or their cost. Many books are written on and around the subjects of play-writing and the theater, but they are chiefly academic and theoretical in treatment, serving as the professor or lecturer on the university rostrum rather than the teacher in the kindergarten. This book is intended for the infant-class in play-construction—for the tyro who has never written a play at all, or who is struggling with his first. During its progress I shall endeavor to answer as simply as possible some of the questions which arise in the mind of the aspirant ignorant of the stage, which same questions seem so simple and so obvious to those of us already connected with the theater. The present volume is in no sense meant as a substitute for any book already before the public, but rather as a sort of preface to the more theoretical literature on the subject.

Wherever possible, different points are illustrated by actual faults occurring in manuscripts brought to my notice. These serve better as examples and lessons than imaginary, or merely possible, blunders which *might* be made in, as yet, unwritten plays.

The example of other text-books on various subjects is followed in the use of quotations from sundry writers and recognized authorities on this and similar matters. Wherever a play, mentioned in the text, is known to be published, and of interest to the student, it will be found listed in the Bibliography.

Written, not from the academic standpoint, but from inside the theater through active connection with it, as actress, writer, and stage-director, I sincerely hope my efforts will be of some slight service to the friends made during my connection with the work.

The foundation of the following chapters is a series of articles—about twelve thousand words—printed in *The Editor*, Ridgewood, N. J., January to June, 1910. Through the courtesy of that magazine, these articles have been revised and much extended.

The chapter on the " Closet " Drama and part of Chapter XXI are included through the courtesy of *The Theatre*.

FANNY CANNON.

New York City, 1915.

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WRITING AND SELLING A PLAY

CHAPTER I

MANUFACTURING A PLAY

THEORY AND PRACTICE

The term "manufacturing" has been frequently applied to the making or building of a play. The word may seem inapposite in reference to a branch of literary composition. However, on the purely technical side of the art, there is something of the deliberateness of manufacture, and as the purpose of this book is to explain, so far as a text-book can, the way to put a play together, the use of the expression will be better understood. This is the only part of playwriting which can be taught—the mechanical art of construction. Subject, treatment, inspiration, variation—all are individual.

Bernard Shaw, in his *Dramatic Essays and Opinions*, says: "The manufacture of well-made plays is not an art; it is an industry. It is not at all hard for a literary mechanic to acquire it; the only difficulty is to find a literary mechanic who is not by nature too much of an artist for the job. For nothing spoils a well-made play more infallibly than the least

alloy of high art, or the least qualm of conscience on the part of the writer," and so on, in his own inimitable manner. All of which cleverly-written diatribe may offend or amuse the earnest playwright according to his humor, and you may take the term as seriously or as humorously as you please. Easy writing is not easy; whether you approach your task as an industry or an art, in spite of the volatile Mr. Shaw, neither you nor any "literary mechanic" is going to find it any too simple. Of late, the expression, "well-made" play, always in quotation marks, has come to be a term of reproach in the modern drama, as applied to the so-called mechanical structures of Messieurs Scribe and Sardou. Both of these gentlemen, however, were indefatigable workers. And the novice is to remember, whether mentioned sarcastically or otherwise, the "well-made" play and its mechanics stand at the basis of all good playwriting.

Theories of play-writing are as many and diverse as their authors. Often they dispute each other in terms polite and academic, but none the less positive. One writer maintains that the characters make the play; an equally decided writer contradicts him flatly —the play makes the characters: successful dramatists have used both methods. One authority insists on four acts, another on three, and so on.

In spite of these differences of opinion, "the play's the thing," and various authors have various ways of arriving at the finished product. Play-writing is an exacting, even a limited, art—with all due apolo-

gies to Mr. Shaw and Mr. Bennett for disagreeing with them—but it is not a problem in mathematics, to be solved in but one way. Any positive theory is impossible; certain fixed formulas might be determined on as the only and all-embracing laws for dramatic writing, when some genius of the theater would ignore them completely in a play which would become the basis for an entirely new set of laws. And these laws vary with each individual writer and with each period of writing. The remark of a playwright who has written more than one successful play is of interest here: "An answer to that question (i.e., how to write a play) can be only a rather confused recollection of a very intricate process which varies with each piece of work."

Nevertheless, the mechanism of the theater, the stage itself, require that certain laws be recognized. These laws, this part of play-writing, cannot be safely set aside. The play must be presented by actors, and witnessed by an audience; neither body can be ignored. (The so-called "Closet-drama" will be touched on in a later chapter.) Other laws, made from time to time by different writers, may or may not be transgressed according to the skill of the playwright. Laws are made and genius breaks them. Books of this kind, therefore, are not written for genius. Yet—I would humbly parenthesize—genius could not play a violin solo the first time the instrument was taken into the hand, so it is prudent to assume that even the heaven-born require some slight directing at first.

You must, for that reason, make the acquaintance of the instrument on which even the greatest of dramatists must play his solo—the stage. Also, as Charles Frohman once said: "Study construction, not for the construction's sake, but as the neatest, swiftest way of telling dramatically whatever you have to tell." Sometimes, a poor idea, skillfully and cleverly rendered into the play-form, will serve its purpose better than a great idea, weakly and incoherently expressed.

CHAPTER II

THE THEATER

PARTS OF THE HOUSE—THE PLATFORM-STAGE—THE STAGE—THE WINGS—THE FLIES—PROPERTIES—DROPS—SCENERY—STAGE-DIRECTIONS—LIGHTS—DIAGRAM

Parts of the house. For a few moments we will stand with the spectator in the auditorium facing the stage. The appearance is that of a gigantic picture-frame. This frame is called the proscenium, or proscenium arch. In it, on either side, are located the boxes. Hanging in the frame or proscenium is the asbestos or fire-curtain, demanded by the fire-department in most cities. This curtain remains down only from the time a theater opens for a performance until the orchestra leader lifts his baton for the beginning of the overture. It is always ready to be lowered quickly in case of emergency. Behind this asbestos curtain is the regular curtain or act-drop, which rises at the beginning of the play and is used between all acts. In front of the curtain a stretch of the stage is visible, bordered on the side nearest the spectator by the footlights. This strip of stage is called the "apron." It is a remnant of the old platform-stage of other days, when the stage

projected into the auditorium, and part of the audience actually sat on it. No wonder, in those days, the "aside" and the monologue, addressed to the spectators, were so popular. The actor was standing practically in the midst of his audience; speaking to them direct seemed in no way incongruous. As the stage receded more and more and all action took place back of the proscenium, this platform narrowed, until to-day, in the average modern theater, it is the merest strip; in some theaters the hanging curtain actually touches the footlights. There are a few exceptions, chiefly in old theaters still in use—notably the Academy of Music, in New York, which was built for Grand Opera. One new theater has a striking example of a wide "apron," giving us in a very large way some impression of the old platform-stage; this is the New York Hippodrome, where the "apron" is about equal in depth to the stage itself. But, again, this theater was built for a definite purpose—scenic spectacles and circus performances. Otherwise, for all ordinary playhouses, the "apron" is practically no more.

The stage. When there is no performance taking place in a theater, the curtains are "up" and the bare stage is visible from the auditorium. By going through one of the boxes we reach this land of mystery and from now on place ourselves in the position of the people of the theater.

The entire stage stretches from footlights to rear-wall, from side-wall to side-wall. Of this expanse the only part visible to a spectator at a performance

is that inclosed by the scenery. On this visible section, at all times, is stretched a floor-cloth or ground-cloth, which prevents any hollow noises from the boards beneath. Over this cloth are stretched the various carpets and ground-pieces required in different plays.

Traps. The space underneath the stage has also its uses. The chief of these which may concern the playwright is the use of "traps," as they are called. These are openings in the floor of the stage. Originally intended for the sudden entrance and exit of characters in fairy pieces, moralities, and the like, to-day they are used almost entirely as wells for staircases supposed to lead to a lower part of the house in which the playwright's characters are living and of which the audience sees but a section; or as openings into supposed cellars or dungeons—or in any of the ways modern realism requires. There is a "trap" at the New York Hippodrome which, opened, permits the inflow of water deep and wide enough to enable horses and men to swim. Other traps are mere holes in the floor, through which electric-light wires are passed as needed.

The wings. On either side of the stage-proper—that is, the part visible to the spectator during a performance—we have the "wings." Here an actor waits for his cue before entering the scene. In the earlier days of the drama all scenes, whether exteriors or interiors, were represented by sections of canvas stretched on frames, which were shoved on to the stage in grooves intended for the purpose.

There are still theaters in small towns where this primitive method is used. The appearance is very much that of the toy-theaters of the shops, when each piece of the cardboard scenery is shoved into the groove intended for it. To-day, only an exterior has use for this old system, when these "wings" represent trees, and so forth, permitting the performer to enter at various points of the stage as one might in any open space. They are no longer run in grooves, but braced to the floor by special irons, or braces. All interiors are now closed in by "flats," like the walls of an actual room, these flats being braced to the floor, but the space outside is still called the wings. The stage no longer slopes, as in other days, from the rear-wall down to the footlights; instead, the auditorium slopes and the stage is level.

The flies. Over the stage, the space between the proscenium arch and the roof is greater than the height from the stage-floor to the top of the proscenium. Looking up, one sees multitudinous ropes, stretches of electric lights, hanging scenery and borders, and so on. This space is called the flies. The fly-gallery runs along the sides, from which stage-hands manipulate the many ropes and lights used in the course of a performance.

That place of wit and fascination, the green-room, is no more, except, perhaps, as a remnant of other days in some old theater, or as an especial courtesy to the players in some ultra-modern playhouse. Actors wait in their dressing-rooms or in the wings.

Properties. The " properties " of a play include everything which is used in any way by the actors or which is required by the playwright, from the billet-doux handed to the heroine to the safe blown open by the villain.

Drops. The " drops " are curtains used during the progress of a play. The back-drop may represent a panorama of land, sea, or sky; it is rarely necessary in interior scenes, except when visible through open doors or windows.

Scenery. Modern scenery is very wonderful in realism and intricacy; there is hardly a demand which a writer can make which cannot be met. But in any scene there are certain things meant only to be looked at, while others must be used. These latter we call " practicable " or " practical." Good writers use both terms. The former is correct from the standpoint of good English; your stage-hand almost invariably says " practical." If we say, " At back, left, is a practicable window " or " Down right is a book-case with practical books," we mean that the window must be built so that it will open and shut, that the book-case must have real books which can be taken out. Otherwise, the book-case would be made with painted or simulated book-backs, and the window would merely look like a window without actually being one.

Stage-directions. Stage-directions are always given from the point of view of the actor. Thus, if we say " right," we mean the actor's right, not that of the audience. If we say " down-stage," we mean

down toward the audience from the actor. Therefore, "up-stage" is at the back, "down-stage" is near the footlights, "right" is to the actor's right, facing the audience, and "left" to his left.

The center of the stage speaks for itself; taking a line from the footlights to the back we have up- or down-center. A line half-way to the right from front to back would be about right center, or, in professional manuscripts, R.C. The upper end of this line would be upper right center, and so on. All entrances and exits in the sides are right and left, or in the director's MS., R. and L. We say down R. or up L. When more exact, we say right second entrance, L. 3d entrance, or wherever the particular door or entrance is placed. In his MS., your experienced playwright is apt to say: "At about R. 2 is a window; at R. 4 is a door." This dates back to the time when all entrances were made between canvas flats or wings, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. These spaces between the wings were called first, second, third, fourth or more, entrances, the first being the entrance nearest the footlights. Therefore, the above direction would mean that a window must be placed at the point where in the old days was the second space between the wings. The canvas flat nearest the footlights is still called the tormenter. An ancient legend is sometimes found scrawled on this piece of canvas even in these days, which puns on the spelling—"Whoso spitteth on the tormenter maketh himself a tormentor." A door at about the middle of the side-wall of a "set" would be spoken

of as R. 2 or R. 3; or, if there was but one door in the wall, simply as "door R."

I know that very admirable writer, William Archer, jeers at these abbreviations in no uncertain terms, as "condemnable" and "abhorrent jargon." Nevertheless, the professional manuscript placed by the writer in the hands of the manager and stage-director nearly always uses just these abbreviations: they save time to write and are easily understood. A play intended for the publisher would, of necessity, be revised for the benefit of the non-theatrical reader. Such directions, however, are to be sparingly used by the novice, as I will explain later.

The drop-curtain. Except in revivals of old melodramas, a scene played in front of a "drop" near the footlights is a rare thing. If used, the drop is so painted as to give the appearance of depth and distance. Such a drop was used in the last act of *The Bird of Paradise;* the scene was a dark one and the drop represented the distant volcano very effectively. But I do not advise the use of it, especially for the novice. Old devices must be used skillfully to hide their artificiality. In vaudeville, monologists and singers appear in front of the drop—what is called by the fraternity "an act in one," meaning between the footlights and the first entrance—but that is because of the continuous nature of the performance; something must be going on while the stage is being set for larger scenes.

Lights. With the lights on the stage the playwright may have much or little to do. If there are

no especial light effects required, he will not have to worry himself about the matter; it may safely be left to the theater electrician. But an author who directs his own plays likes to know something of the lights to be used; it will do the novice no harm to know a little of them and where they are placed. The principal light on the stage is furnished by an almost continuous square frame of banks of lamps—two or three rows—around the proscenium arch and across the floor of the stage. These, in turn, are called the footlights, the proscenium lights at either side, and the first border lights across the top just back of the first hanging strip of canvas or masking-cloth. These strips of canvas are called "borders," and back of each one, to the last border, may hang strips of border lights, if the scene is an exterior. Also at each side may hang strips of lights, parallel to the proscenium lights, to keep the scenery from casting unnatural shadows. These are usually hung on the back of the scenery wings. There may even be additional footlights in certain exterior scenes, though these are chiefly in spectacular productions.

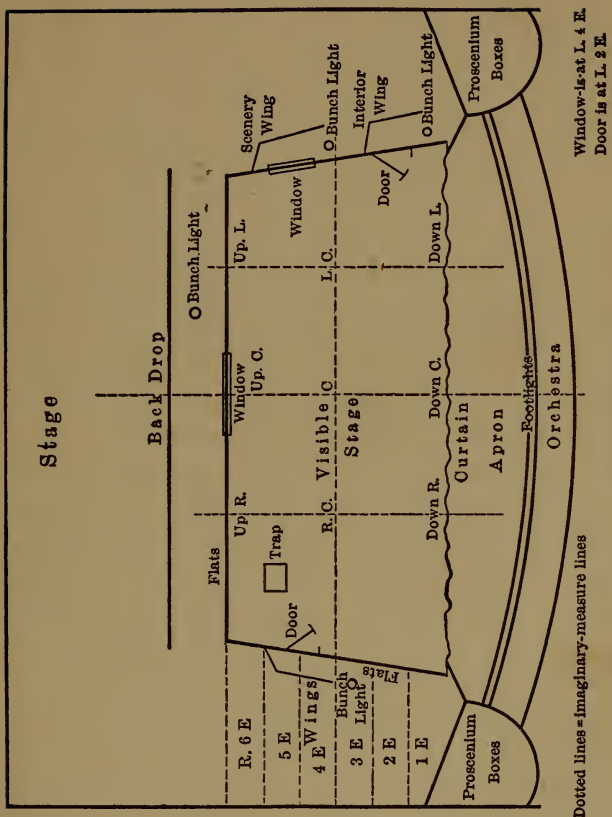
To illuminate the outside of a window, or the hallway into which a door may be supposed to open, we have bunch-lights, or "bunches," and arc lamps. The former are clusters of lights arranged with each bulb radiating from the center and placed in front of a large reflector, all standing on a long, slender iron rod about five or six feet tall. Other forms of bunches are in oblong or square reflectors, the bulbs pointing toward each other from top to bottom. This last

arrangement is the one used chiefly when different colors are needed in sunset or dark scenes. The arc lamps, or "olivettes," are also arranged in reflectors, and on standards. Screens, of a size to be easily handled, are of wood framing isinglass of the required shade—red, blue, green, yellow—and are placed by the electrician in front of the light as required. Formerly, all lights were white; now, except for the "spot light," which is an arc lamp, thrown from a gallery on some especial player or scene (usually in comic opera or vaudeville), very few white lights are to be seen. The usual daylight scene requires a yellow light, much less trying to the actors and far more natural. There are also in each bank of lights bulbs of various other colors, used to represent different hours of the day or conditions of the atmosphere. The "bunches" are generally used outside an opening door to light what is supposed to be another room or hall. The arc is used for exteriors, and wherever stronger lights are required. More and more is there being made an effort to get these lights as near as possible to the ordinary conditions and aspects they are supposed to represent. This special subject is one that Gordon Craig, the son of Ellen Terry, has been working on for years.

One use of the arc is in what is known as the "baby-spot." It throws a strong light just about the size of the human face. To produce the right effect, it is placed either on the fly-gallery, in the wings, or pointing in through a window, the light

falling directly on the face of the actor who may be playing an important scene in which it is necessary to see his expression clearly. On a stage otherwise lighted the audience is hardly aware of this "spot"; it merely is able to see a certain face a little more clearly without sensing why.

There is just one other point before we leave this question of the purely mechanical side of the stage. Every playwright should be something of an architect, not only in metaphor but in fact. He must know something of the house in which his characters live, though he show his audience but one room. One often sees, even in the best plays, curious happenings like the following: an actor exits through a door and turns off in a direction which, if we are to judge by the appearance of the vista just outside the window next the door, would carry him out into space. And he is not supposed to be going out, but upstairs! Or he will re-enter from a side of the stage which he could not possibly reach from his point of exit, unless the house turned around. Sardou is often accused of being a mere mechanic of the theater, yet some of his methods of work should be a guide and inspiration to many a novice. Jerome A. Hart, in *Sardou and the Sardou Plays*, tells us that Sardou not only drew up plans of the houses in which his action took place, but made maps of the imaginary vicinities where his people lived. He showed a friend on one occasion a sketch: "That is a pen-and-ink map of Pontarey, the scene of my latest play. Pontarey exists only in my imagination, and to avoid any mis-


Stage
Back Drop
Flats
Up. R.
Trap
Door
Window
Up. C.
Bunch Light
Up. L.
Scenery Wing
Window
Bunch Light
Interior Wing
Door
Bunch Light
Proscenium Boxes
R. 6 E
5 E
4 E
Wings
Bunch Light
3 E
2 E
1 E
Flats
R. C.
Visible Stage
C
L. C.
Down R.
Down C.
Down L.
Curtain
Apron
Footlights
Orchestra
Proscenium Boxes
Window-is-at L. 4 E.
Door is at L. 2 E.
Dotted lines = imaginary-measure lines
Auditorium

takes or confusion as to the movements of the personages, I have drawn this."

These things are only to inform the novice. Until he knows more about it, there is no need to fill his manuscript up with directions as to the positions of his characters. Unless he is used to stage-direction, he is almost certain to get it wrong. The fewer stage-directions, the better—until he knows his business. Incorrect directions are worse than none at all.

The accompanying diagram will be a help.

Outside of each door which opens and shuts is a wing which folds like a two-leaved screen; it is used to hide the regions beyond which would otherwise be made visible by the opening door.

When all this scenery is to be taken down to make the stage ready for another act, nothing is moved until the manager calls out "Strike!" Then, with practical celerity, each man at his special station takes apart the palatial interior and shifts each piece to some particular place, ready to be easily found at the next performance. By the time the "set" is entirely "struck," the next scene is rapidly taking shape; what seemed like wild chaos for a few minutes is wonderful order—and Act Two is ready to be "called."

CHAPTER III

THE AUTHOR

QUALIFICATIONS — TRAINING — STUDY — DRAMATIC INSTINCT — GENERAL CULTURE

Qualifications. The very first maxim in regard to play-writing is: don't do it until you know what you are about. You would not dream of sitting down to a game of bridge without at least a working knowledge of the rules. This is doubly true of dramatic composition. Learn the rules before you play the game. Then play a while for practice before you sit down to a game with experts. The people who *can* write plays will write them in spite of all drawbacks. The people who cannot should be dissuaded in every way permissible to a law-abiding population. I mean the foregoing to be discouraging only to that unfortunately large class of would-be dramatists who go ahead on the blissful theory that writing a play is a mere matter of putting a number of speeches into the mouths of certain characters; or to that smaller but more difficult class who live in the hope that to them will be given the rare capacity of doing something great by intuition and instinct alone. These people will never write a play until they realize there is something to be learned. It might be well for you at this point to turn at once to Chapter

XXIII—which is not a bad number for it, in this connection—and read it. Afterward, if your determination remains unchanged, you can be helped, and can help yourself, by study and practice.

Ask yourself honestly—just how fit are you to write a play? You say you have a story to tell. It had better stay merely a story than run the risk of being marred by a form unfamiliar to the writer. You may sometimes write an interesting story which will be readable and yet be hardly more than a sketch of the episode—a dramatic outline like a newspaper reporter's accounts, some of which make excellent reading. But in a play you must work with people, not outlines. Their emotions, great or small according to the characters, must be human.

How much do you know of the lives you intend to portray, or of life in general? That may seem an almost laughable question. Yet it is truly amazing how many novices will rush into tremendous subjects with which their life experience has rendered them utterly unable to cope. Emily Brontë failed in a measure when she attempted certain facts of life of which she was necessarily ignorant—and she was a genius. A play came to my notice some time ago which dealt with a big and vital social problem. But the play was attempted by a girl barely out of her 'teens. She might know the facts; what could her youth and inexperience guess of the mental processes which brought them all about?

Therefore, for your first play at least—and all others, unless you are willing to collaborate—let alone

what in the nature of things is outside your understanding. It would be well to remember in this connection, however, that understanding and experience are not synonymous terms; there are many things you can find out by study and research. For instance, it is not necessary to have been a murderer to write a play around such a crime, nor to have been *particeps criminis* in a divorce case to plan a drama on divorce conditions.

Training. However, being sure that you have a story to tell and that you fully comprehend the subject and its emotions, the next question of your fitness is: how much do you know of the theater and its plays, the actors and their work? You say that from the audience you have witnessed plays for many years. As spectator only? Or have you dissected and analyzed as you watched? It is almost impossible to do the latter unless you are guided by someone who knows; you will not know just what to dissect. Unless you are initiated, certain important matters will utterly escape you. You might study by constant reading of printed plays. But the theater, like everything else, changes frequently. So, in spite of the occasional and, to me, mistaken advice to the contrary, you must know something of the playhouse and its exigencies. As one writer says: "To have been an actor is a better training for a playwright than a college education." You may write a play without a technical knowledge of the theater, but it will have all kinds of things done to it at rehearsals, should it get so far, to pay for

your ignorance of the stage and its mechanism. Still, these things can all be learned: books, teachers, and, best of all, experience, point the way.

Study. I have spoken of Sardou's methods of work. A leaf from his book is not out of place at this point, since it shows how one man, earnestly desirous of becoming a dramatist, went to work. Says Hart, in the book before mentioned: "He (Sardou) began a methodical system of analysis of Scribe's plays. For instance, he would read the first act of a play, and stop there; write the remainder himself and then compare his work with Scribe's; or he would begin in the middle of a play, and endeavor from reading one act to construct what had gone before and was to follow. He thus acquired that stagecraft which so puzzled the critics of his earlier plays, for it is usually the fruit of long experience."

The person who has studied plays and the stage goes to the work of writing a drama metaphorically with his hat off. I remember a friend who after years of experience as actress and writer was at work on her first play. Almost reverently she spoke of it to a non-professional friend, who was mildly interested and who then remarked: "John Smith's brother writes plays—very clever ones—and he's only seventeen."

Amazed, she said: "Does he know anything of the stage?"

"No, never stood behind the footlights in his life; knows nothing of it."

This was said as if the matter was of no conse-

quence, and play-construction as simple as letter-writing. But she said nothing more of her play, except to people who understood. It was the old story of "fools rushing in——"

Walter Pritchard Eaton, one of our foremost critics, says on this very matter: "The fact that he knows nothing about the theater, that he has never trained his mind in terms of the stage, that the dramatic medium is not the medium proper to his imagination, does not deter him in the slightest. . . . The man who makes plays, not from born instinct, but because somebody else has written plays that brought a fortune—that man scorns practice, would sit down to write a great drama at the first try, would have it that a noble, and intricate, and baffling art can be mastered in a moment and by anybody."

You may enter the world equipped with imagination and other gifts fitting you for literary composition; but you do not enter this vale of tears a playwright. One is not born an electrician or a geometrician, however much one's tastes or instincts may run in these directions. A taste for anything, even a certain gift for it, is not the ability to do it without the addition of technical knowledge.

People with no connection with, or experience in, the theater sometimes succeed. They must belong to that class of careful observers who in their attendance at the playhouse have noted just the right things for their information and have been possessed of a marked natural dramatic instinct. Even these must write and re-write. A certain successful

dramatist said he did not call himself by that name until he had completed his fourth play. And Eugène Scribe is said to have had fourteen failures before his first success!

Dramatic knowledge. Certainly, if not actually connected with the stage, there must be a working knowledge of its mechanics, its intricacies. Perhaps a suggestion I made recently to an aspirant for dramatist's honors may be of value to others. If in your home city there is a good dramatic club, join it. By a good club, I mean one with an efficient director, and which gives occasional performances in public. Even if you have no remarkable ability as an actor, you will at least learn something by actual practice of the things which can and cannot be done. It will be of especial value in the matter of exits and entrances, the handling of a number of people, and so on. Another suggestion, if the former is not practicable: obtain permission from the manager to watch from the wings an occasional rehearsal of some good stock company playing near you. This can sometimes be arranged, and will be of the utmost value in acquainting you with your tools. A certain young writer with a recent Broadway success to his credit, deliberately hired himself out to a dramatic company as a stage-hand, to get a working knowledge of the stage and its environs.

From the preceding it would seem that actors should write the best plays. Not necessarily—any more than that a singer should write the best songs. But given to the actor the ability to write, and to

the singer the inspiration to compose, the actor's play will be entirely within the scope of the playhouse, and the singer's song entirely within the range of the human voice. There will be no great mechanical error in either.

Dramatic instinct. I have spoken frequently of the dramatic instinct. Just what is it? To most of us it is that part, the only part, of play-writing which is born in the writer. By experience and study he may acquire skill; lacking this instinct as a birthright, the way is long. It is the instinct that makes the actor take to the stage as his profession, the writer to the drama as his medium. It is only an instinct—it is not ability, nor technique, nor experience.

I speak of it in this way and at such length because one very able, very excellent writer and teacher makes this astonishing statement, which needs to be contradicted before we proceed any further: "If you have any idea that you have dramatic instinct and that it was born in you, get rid of it." Had he said "dramatic knowledge" or "dramatic ability," anyone, everyone, must agree. But "instinct" of any kind is an inborn quality. One is not born a chemist, but one is born with a curious instinct for chemical and mathematical matters which takes him into that field. One has only to watch growing children to notice this. Let any one of them have a marked instinct for any field of endeavor, and it sticks out all over him. Dramatic instinct is as distinct from the art of play-writing as is the tendency, which keeps the little girl dosing and bandaging her long-

suffering dolls in imaginary illnesses, separate from the knowledge which may finally make of her a successful physician or skilled trained nurse. The very word itself proves this. The best dictionaries define it as a "special innate propensity," "natural intuitive power." The Latin root *instinctus* means an impulse. You will understand, therefore, whenever I use the term, I am referring to an "innate propensity" and not in any way to ability or knowledge. It will save you from the confusion evidently present in the mind of the writer to whom I have referred. That there is such an instinct and that in some rare, very rare, instances it can go far has been proven by the success of some first plays written by authors who had never attempted the work before—and, mayhap, never did again. In any case, the danger to the author in the differences between instinct and knowledge is that on the one hand he may feel that he is born with some divine gift which makes study and practice unnecessary; or on the other hand he may fruitlessly wonder why after all his study and practice, his knowledge of technique and the theater, he has not been able to write anything that can be truly called a play. The two must go together, with perhaps the balance swinging just a little bit heavier on the side of hard work and study.

Study plays. For preparation, be sure to include in your reading and study modern plays, published, or in the theater. Those of the best and most representative of present-day writers—Pinero, Henry

Arthur Jones, Clyde Fitch, Augustus Thomas, John Galsworthy, Charles Rann Kennedy, and many others, can all be read in book-form and will serve better for models for the novice than those of the more "literary" school, of which more later. You need not fear what seems to be the bugaboo of some writers on this subject, that you will become the disciple of one master, or the slave of one form of play or subject, if there is enough variation in the plays and theaters under your observation. Keep your mind open; avoid absolutely any fixed attitude toward the play. Thus, any deviation from preconceived notions about the drama need not affect you as something wrong. You may really be witnessing a skillful blazing of a new trail. If you can write at all, the theater will merely show you the correct form or mold in which to run your own material. That material is worthless unless life itself has given you your inspiration.

Certainly this manner of study will keep you from making innumerable unnecessary mistakes. One has only to come in frequent contact with a few of the novice's errors to realize how easily some of them could have been avoided had the writer only gone to school to the theater. Besides, the mistakes made in unsuccessful plays have their value as well as the good points of successful ones. It is a saying incapable of contradiction—that we learn by the mistakes of others as well as our own.

General culture. In dramatic writing, as in any other art, general culture and education are an

asset, though they will not teach you the mastery of your preferred task. To one who really wishes to become a musician, as an instance, the hearing of the best music, the association with the greatest artists, will be a distinct addition to the store of knowledge which must stand back of every performer. But to anyone not a musician, merely a lover of good music, such association does not in the least affect performance, however much it may add to his opinions and statements on the subject. Therefore, it is unnecessary to add that the gift comes first, then work on the subject, and lastly whatever culture and training along intellectual lines you are fortunate enough to have had, or which you may be able to add at this time.

"First plays." Just one word more at this point: it is needed. Sometimes when a play is produced we are told by the press—should the play succeed—that this is the author's first play. And through this same medium the author usually insists that he "just did it," or that "it wrote itself," or in some other way disclaims any real work or effort—though just why he should feel this heightens the effect is hard to understand, as in most successes people like to tell us how hard they have struggled. However, these authors never add anything about the many, many changes, interpolations, excisions, et cetera, made at rehearsals, by the manager, or stage-director, or even the actors themselves. Often another and more experienced playwright is called in to help. None of these names appear on the bills as co-authors. The

play, in short, has been accepted in spite of its lack of stagecraft or other technical deficiencies, because it had some unusual qualities and was not altogether impossible to re-write. As almost no plays, even by experienced writers, see production without some changes—though in these cases the authors themselves make the changes as required—it is not likely that a novice's first play will be staged untouched. But more of this in a later chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THEME AND STORY

STORY ADAPTED TO PLAY-FORM—FULL COMPREHENSION OF THE STORY—A REASON FOR THINGS—KNOWLEDGE OF SUBJECT-MATTER—NOVELTY—THE "SLICE OF LIFE" DRAMA—ABILITY TO SELECT STORY—ONE THEME CARRIED THROUGHOUT—CHANGE IN PLOT—THE PROPAGANDA PLAY—THE DEAD ISSUE

Story adapted to play-form. In scope, the play is more closely allied to the short story than to the novel. The former deals with one episode and its incidents, while the latter may be entirely lacking in story. Witness the autobiographical novels of Thackeray, Dickens, the Brontës—interesting, but relating many incidents and episodes, and covering a lifetime in characterization.

The play, like the short story, must contain one central motive or idea, and the working out of that one idea by whatever lesser attendant matters the main theme demands.

Having a story to tell, you must decide whether it is adapted to the play-form. Many stories are interesting; all are not necessarily dramatic. Some are dramatic, but too simple to work out through a play. As a rule, the play presents the dynamic

phases of life, the crises, the climaxes. Sometimes these may be tragic, sometimes humorous. The novelist can lead us up to one of these crises through many chapters, by way of many contributing causes and much psychological analysis. Your dramatist can only touch on these causes in his exposition. Events, which in a story cover many days, must in a play be of such a nature as to reconcile us to their covering but a few minutes. Sometimes unusual means are taken to bring about this reconciliation. In *On Trial* we have a story, absolutely single and progressive, yet giving the impression to many unthinking critics of being the reverse. The play is concerned with a murder trial. Instead of forcing us to listen to evidence which might be tedious coming from the witness chair, we are allowed to see the story the witness relates as it actually happened. Therefore, though in each case, the witness goes back over the years, the narration is taking just about the time during which we are following it, and the play progresses just as a real trial does, just as any good detective story does, with a really forward, though often seemingly backward, move to its conclusion. It is unique, but really not as iconoclastic as many of the critics seemed to think.*

* To prove this statement, comparing this play to a detective story instead of a moving-picture, read C. F. Horne's definition of a detective story in his "Technique of the Novel." Just why the moving-picture comparison was made by so many of the critics on the morning after the opening is not exactly clear. Several months after seeing the play, the present writer saw

If you decide that your story is suitable for the play-form, you will find it helpful to write it out *as* a story. This is not a scenario, merely a test of its dramatic qualities. Arnold Bennett says that a story which is not capable of rendering viva voce is not worth writing. By the same token, a story which cannot be written out is not worth dramatization. It is not enough, however, just to have a story; it must be of a kind susceptible of dramatic treatment. To see it written is a fair test. This method serves another purpose: it will show you as no other means can just what is in your story. As an instance: an actress had written a play. She was a good raconteur, dramatic in gesture, enthusiastic, earnest. She told the story of her play to several fellow-players who listened with the deepest interest. She certainly had a "story." According to Bennett, rendered aloud, it fulfilled all requirements. Then, in turn, each of the group read the play. It was a curious circumstance: not three-quarters of the material in her mind had been transferred to her manuscript. Just this one little test—writing it first as a complete story—would have shown her the enormous amount she had omitted.

Comprehension of the story. Be sure you know fully all there is in your story. Sometimes after you start you will find more, perhaps less, than you

a moving-picture in which these same devices were used, and it gave the same impression of novelty as had the play—proving that the method was no more usual to the photoplay than to the drama. It belongs to the detective story form.

thought. Occasionally one will have a story with material enough for three plays—and not know it. Good stuff is so often wasted in this way, because the author does not realize it exists. I remember reading a play which simply bulged with unused opportunity. There was a knowledge of stagecraft and a certain sense of construction. But the story was weak. The hero was blind, for no reason that I could discover; certainly no dramatic use was made of the fact. He might just as well have been lame, or perfectly sound, for that matter. There was a murder, and the cause held possibilities; the situation went nowhere. Alone, it might have made a good detective story. Another episode was big enough for a play by itself, but was only partially developed. One idea after another went by the wall because the author did not know his own story.

A reason for things. Have a reason for things. I shall speak of this more fully when we come to prepare the actual scenario. But it is enough to say now that, if you make a character so-and-so, it must be because it is necessary to have him just that kind of a character. If, on the other hand, it is your character which has caused your play, then the situations to which that character gives rise must have their reason in his personality.

Subject-matter. Know your subject-matter fully, whether you are writing a newspaper squib or a dramatic composition in five acts and prologue. I am reminded just here of a story in a well-known magazine. The heroine was a girl who felt she was

a genius, but her plain and simple country life offered no altars on which the fires could burn. Her family scrimped and saved that she might go abroad to study people and the world. Because of her Art, she haughtily refused the hand and heart of a young professor in her home town, and sailed away. Anxiously the folks back home waited for the golden flood to flow from her gifted pen. But she had not yet found quite what she sought. Then there drifted to her rumors of a book, a clever novel, written by her one-time lover. She was disdainful, but curiosity finally prompted her to send for the book. It was wonderful, yet sweet and homelike. He had used as his models just the dear people among whom he lived, and the story glowed with truth. While she—it is here that the moral enters. It points exactly my meaning. Unless you are writing burlesque or fantasia, use people and happenings within your comprehension, if not your actual experience.

Do not lay your scenes within a walk of life with which you are totally unfamiliar. If your knowledge of society is bounded by the small village church-social or a factory ball, do not write a play dealing with the exclusive circles of London or New York society. Another apparently useless remark, you say. One would think so. Yet I see play-manuscripts all too often dealing with all phases of " high-society " that would be funny if the attempts were not pathetic in their self-betrayal. Why, oh, why, will people try to write of the doings of the fashionable world when every word they put on paper screams their

ignorance of the most ordinary usages of that world?

Novelty. Novelty is at most times the demand of manager and public. Do not let yourself think for one single instant that you can ignore the importance of either demand; their claims must be met. You need not be so sure that compliance with the desires of the " crowd " is despicable. The play cannot exist without the public. No matter how great your message, if they will neither listen nor read, it does not reach them. You must get their attention. Be certain that in an effort to write *down* to your public you do not write below it. Margaret Mayo says she loves her audience. Certainly, the man who despises it will not be heeded. Shakespeare's genius, his great thoughts, his almost prophetic philosophies, did not cause him to forget the public. He provided entertainment, color, mystery, excitement. His greatness reached them through a medium they understood, and he did not deny the value of that medium. Since Shakespeare did not disdain novelty, neither need you. Either your story or its handling must have something unusual or " different." The Civil War drama, just by way of example, at this present writing is almost a dead issue, and to reach a manager for production must have some unique or exceptional qualification to bring it to his notice.

The " slice of life " drama. The kinds of " story " available in the theater of to-day cannot be classified. The field is wide and varied as life itself. So far is the drama endeavoring to transcribe reality,

that many modern writers make frequent use of what Bernard Shaw aptly calls " a slice of life "—an episode which has not reached either a catastrophe or a " happy ending " by the final curtain. Such plays, however, require expert handling; the danger of a very real—and perhaps excusable—dissatisfaction on the part of the audience is evident. There is also a difference of opinion as to the entire propriety of this phase, as the drama represents not so much a mere segment of life as a boiled-down, concrete essence of it; that is, as several writers have said: it is not only a picture of life, but a judgment on it. The theme in the " slice of life " play leaves the conclusion of the argument to the spectator. Therefore, logically, the argument, or syllogism, is incomplete.

Ability to select story. The ability to select a good story is not so rare as one might think. We only see the writer's handling of it, which may be so bad as to kill his whole idea. Recently the mail brought a play—in long-hand—which on reading startled with the greatness, the actual grandeur, of the theme chosen. It lay in a practically undeveloped field so far as modern drama is concerned, and was a subject for a master, one able to think greatly and feel deeply. It was told as a schoolgirl tells a tale to children. The writer's imagination was all right, since she had been able to conceive of this subject as one for the drama. But she had " bitten off more than she could chew." The fault lay not so much in this truth as in the fact that the writer

did not know it, did not for one instant realize the actual bigness of the matter itself. To choose a subject greater than your capacity is rather a virtue than otherwise, since it proves the largeness of your viewpoint and the power of your imagination. But not to *realize* the strength of your own ideas puts you in the class with the student of the art-school who insists on painting in oils from the nude with all its marvelous flesh tints, planes, and modeling—to say nothing of the mixing of color and use of brush—instead of sitting down in front of a few plaster cubes and pyramids to learn drawing and perspective. Such a student has a long way to go, because he lacks the eye to see the problem which such a model and medium present to the person who has not yet even learned to draw.

So often, too, a really good story, one which would be entirely within the capability of the writer if told differently, is utterly spoiled by his use of this tempting but entirely unfamiliar form of writing. For that reason it is well to realize that even a good story or situation does not necessarily make that composite structure—a play. In addition there must be what William Archer, in *About the Theater*, speaks of as "study of character, observation of life, originality of method."

One theme carried throughout. I have said there must be but one theme or motive in a play; be sure you carry it through your composition. Without a central theme or argument, you have nothing on which to hang your play. A certain drama—only

in manuscript—started out giving the impression that it would deal with a phase of the labor question. It was badly done, but the idea was there. It was completely lost sight of before the end of Act Two, and the reader was plunged into a maze of impossible "society" situations. Anything which delays or turns aside or fogs the steady moving forward of your story is out of place; and, unless handled by a very skilled craftsman, this "matter out of place" will show itself very plainly as a detriment to the play's success.

Theme and subject. There is a distinction between theme or motive, and subject. "The soul of a play is its theme, and the body of a play is its story. A play may have a great theme and an inadequate story, or an interesting story, and scarcely any theme at all." The motive of *Othello* is the devastating power and unreason of jealousy. The subject is the particular phase of jealousy displayed by Othello and the causes leading thereto. The story or subject must be original in treatment and expression; the motive may be as old as the hills. An old theme can be treated in a new way: new light may be brought to bear upon it from a totally different angle. Otherwise, all of the available material would have been used up centuries ago. There are only just so many human combinations, just so many laws of human relationships. But the differences in their combinations, the variation in these relationships, are well-nigh as many as the individuals included in them. The point of view in no two people is identical.

Therefore, in spite of a certain limitation in theme, there is a wide area in expression. There may be half a dozen stories to express the theme you have in mind. Your skill is shown in choosing the best and most dramatic of these stories.

Change in plot. A change in story or plot during the course of a play is an even worse fault than a change of theme, because more glaringly noticeable to the audience. It is not sufficient to give an exact portrait of life, the portrait must be explained; not to explain the matter which it was evident at the start you intended should be unfolded or disentangled is almost fatal: which is another difficulty of the "slice of life" form of drama. I have seen this complete change of plot in the short confines of a one-act play—by a novice, needless to state. It is not an error apt to be made by an experienced writer.

Propaganda plays. As a matter of motive and story, I have frequently encountered what might be called the "propaganda" play—the play whose motive is to convert an audience to a certain way of thinking on some subject of public policy or interest. It is a difficult medium to use for such a purpose, and best let alone by the novice until he is more familiar with his tools; otherwise he will only succeed in being deadly dull. An audience hates to be preached at—unless it is done deftly. The sermon form of play is by no means an impossibility. It has been done, and done successfully in the last few years, but "a play that is a bore cannot claim

salvation on the ground that it is a sermon." In dealing with the propaganda play I am not so much referring to the modern form of morality or thesis play—most people are agreed that certain things are good, and their opposites bad—nor do I mean the dynamic type of play intended to arouse the public conscience, but to the style of play which deals with a subject on which there are distinctly several points of view and in the discussion of which an author risks offending or even insulting part of an audience, however much he may succeed in interesting those who already hold the same opinions as himself. When a play is written along such lines the question must be so handled as to please those who agree with the author's premise, while at the same time presenting arguments sufficiently strong to his opponents to make them see, temporarily at least, his point of view. All kinds of people make up an audience and it is not well to antagonize, to say nothing of the fact that the writer is sure to be refused a hearing by any manager who happens to hold opposing views —unless his play is big enough in treatment to somewhat conceal his motive. J. H. Gardiner, in *The Making of Arguments*, says: "In no case, with a popular audience is it very safe to depend much on the burden of proof; almost always it is better to jump in and actively build up the argument on your own side. In argument, as in strategy, take the offensive whenever you can." By "taking the offensive" in play-writing is meant that you must prove your points as you go along and not wait for possible

disagreements to spur you into explanations. Forestall every one of them; if you cannot, you have no right to even attempt the propaganda drama.

But, if a play is *not* propaganda, *not* for the purpose of making converts to the author's point of view, why risk giving offense to part of an audience when there is no possible dramatic reason for doing so? It is done, oh, yes, every day by the unthinking aspirant. As padding (i.e., any extraneous matter used as "filler" to make a play long enough) he will drag in a discussion on some question of the day, one that in no way furthers his play or story, and treat it so flippantly or ignorantly as to disgust everyone who has thought on the subject. There was a play which had a different plot in each of the five acts, each act was laid in a different part of the world, and each act contained some entirely irrelevant conversation between the characters. One of these arguments was of the order I have just been discussing—the kind that has no business in a play unless it helps the story to get somewhere, and which in that case must be so treated as not to insult the intelligence of those who probably know more of the subject than the writer. Charles Frohman said once in an interview, when explaining why he refused to even read a certain type of play on such subjects as the labor question, women's suffrage, and so forth: "If the author does not take sides, his play has no conclusion; if he does take sides, he offends at least half his audience." Your manager wants everybody to come to the theater, not just those interested in

your subject. So, while I know there is a distinct place in the drama for the propaganda play, experience does not lead me to believe the novice will write it. And let me again remind you—my remarks throughout are meant for the novice.

The dead issue. If denied the propaganda play, do not go to the opposite extreme and take as your motive some subject or issue already settled, and rightly settled, to the satisfaction of the world at large. There are such subjects, matters in which justice and civilization have prevailed and which in their present form have become a matter of course. Such subjects are not for the drama unless the writer can drag into light some new story of the struggle which caused the change. Deal carefully and sparingly with the " dead issue." Do not misunderstand me. These subjects used as *background* against which your characters love and struggle are for the drama or any other form of writing. It is the use of such subjects as theme, or motive, to which I am objecting. Take as a suggestive example a play of the American Civil War. If your play merely uses this period and its struggles as background and causation for your characters and their actions, you have a right to use it, though the war is over these many years. But if your reason for writing the play is to prove something about the war itself, and the war-story is the main theme, and the loves and struggles of your people the medium used to convey your arguments about the war, do you not see that a " dead issue " has been raised, and fought over? And

to what purpose? I am not quoting from any particular play, nor do I recall one written with this motive. But I have seen plays—in MS.—on issues as old and as hardly fought and finished as the play which I have suggested.

CHAPTER V

PHASES OF THE STORY

PLANNING FOR SEQUENCE—UNITIES—THE SUB-PLOT—FLIGHTS OF FANCY—REALISM—CONTRARY TO THE KNOWN FACTS—BE HUMAN—BE LOGICAL—BE CONTEMPORANEOUS

Planning for sequence. With your story forming itself in your mind, there is still much to be done before the setting forth of your idea in scenario form—much to be planned and digested. The story must be so shaped and re-shaped that events come in proper sequence arranged so as to take the audience step by step to the dénouement. Professor Adolphus William Ward says: "Every drama should represent in organic sequence the several stages of which a complete action consists, and which are essential to it. Every action, if conceived of as complete, has its causes, growth, height, consequences, and close." As in all rules, there are exceptions to this; in the "slice of life" drama we do not conceive of the action as complete when presented, and frequently omit the close, in some cases even the consequences. But even in this uncertain form, the latter should be implied or suggested; we use our imagination and carry the story on from the point at which the dramatist left his characters, guided by the sig-

nificant aspects of his finale. Aristotle advised the tying of the knot, and then its untying; or, in other words, the arising of a number of complications as a result of certain actions or forces, and the extrication of the characters from the consequent situations. In the modern drama this rule is by no means rigidly followed, so far as a full and finished explanation is concerned. But some sort of sequence is necessary. If certain events occur, it must be because certain other events preceded. Some of these may have taken place before the drama opens. If they are essential for the spectator's understanding, he must know of them. He must be told carefully, skillfully, disguising the fact that the writer is explaining at all. This is the "exposition" of which we will speak again.

Unities. Aristotle also laid great stress on the unities—those oft-quoted unities of time, place, and action. Again we have a rule no longer strictly followed, although of late years it has been frequently insisted upon because of the consequent saving of expense in production. It is an excellent rule for the novice. It helps him to keep his matter in one cohesive whole—a thing not easy to do without practice. To keep the action as much as possible within the range of as short a time and distance as is consistent with the clear telling of the story will materially help the writer in holding the singleness of motive and subject. Many plays, nowadays, cover a period of a few days or less, frequently within the hours between overture and the fall of the final

curtain. Rarely do they require the passage of years between. Notice the exceptions to this: such plays as *Rosemary, The Prince Chap, Mile-stones* —perhaps one play of the kind in years. In all these plays mentioned the unusual stretch of time is used to present a novelty, not as a matter of course. Often all the action takes place within one house, or even one room, frequently within one city. There is good reason for this. One feels as if actually watching through some magic glass scenes occurring at that very moment. A more commercial yet none the less potent reason enters here as to why too much shifting of "locale" is detrimental to the sale of the novice's play. Many changes of scenery will entail extra expense on the producer, added items of risk in the preliminary outlay. He is not to be blamed if he takes such things into account when dealing with an unknown quantity. However, write your practice-play all over the map—at first—so long as you get it written. Your bringing it together afterward will only add to its strength.

Sub-plots. It has been said there must be but one theme, and one episode. By episode, I do not mean situation, but one plot, one "complete action." The sub-plot has practically disappeared from play-writing. If you can tell your story—prose fashion—simply and tersely, you will note that you have but one plot. Other interests, other incidents, other matters may enter. But at the last analysis your "plot" needed them to carry it forward. This is the unity of action—the most potent, the most unyielding of the

three unities. You may defy it, if you have the skill. You cannot go wrong if you follow it.

Flights of fancy. With your story well in hand, go over it carefully to be sure your material needs no overhauling. Certain flights of fancy are permissible, even in everyday drama. We frequently do not notice a lack of plausibility, if the story is gripping, and arrives somewhere. This is as true in books as in plays. It is not unknown in criminal jurisprudence with clever lawyers skilled in oratory. However, unless writing a certain type of play with which we will deal later, use this license sparingly in these days of realism. One offense is unpardonable; you must not fly in the face of known facts. The possible exceptions might be satire, burlesque, or extravaganza.

Realism. As an instance of my meaning: in a play written around the American Revolution, the part designed by the author as " comic relief " was that of a sergeant. Now, it so happens that military tactics are possibly as inelastic as any rules of human conduct can be. They were even more strict in those long-ago days of almost constant warfare between the nations. The character in question was a British soldier, which fact would necessitate a much more exact discipline than that maintained over the raw recruits of the Continental Army. The author, however, ignoring all these matters known to the merest schoolboy, allowed the sergeant to enter, meet his lieutenant, who was a very minor character, almost a supernumerary, in the play—but still a lieu-

tenant in the English army—and melodramatically shout at him some instructions or news without salute or any other mark of respect. Then, turning to the men standing about, the sergeant gave some orders, leading them off-stage, his superior officer trailing meekly in the rear—to give the comedian the center of the stage! Of course, some of this was bad stage-direction; but, as the director was also the author, it is evident these omissions were the fault of his manuscript. Easily obtainable fact was mercilessly sacrificed to a thrilling scene for the funny man. This play was actually produced "on the road" with several well-known players in the cast. Could the star-author-director have heard the giggling remarks of some military-school boys seated in the orchestra, he might have realized the importance of points he had not considered worth his attention.

Always remember the chance that somewhere in your audience may be seated the man or woman who has made a special study of the subject you are treating so ignorantly or so slightingly; no matter how obscure that subject may be, or how brief your reference to it, stick to fact. To prove to you how careful is the writer who knows his business, and who treats it with all the seriousness it deserves: a man was working on a play in which he expected to introduce the character of a young officer in the United States Navy. This character was one of the less important people in the drama. Had the writer been the author of the Revolutionary play before mentioned, he would have been satisfied to put a naval

uniform on his creation and send him adrift to make all kinds of "breaks" of the sort which invariably irritate and antagonize the Navy and its friends. In this case, inquiries were made everywhere as to the rules governing Annapolis, letters were sent to naval officers actually stationed on duty; nothing which could be discovered was ignored in the completion of this character and the part he played in the story. As a result, though his "lines" in the play were few, he was a naval officer, the terms used about him and by him were correct, and no naval law, written or unwritten, had been transgressed.

Contrary to known facts. A novice's play had a duel scene between two officers in the United States Army of to-day. Not once in the play was mention made of the fact that dueling is absolutely against both the laws of the country and the code of the Army. If two American soldiers were to fight a bona fide duel, the fact of their so far transgressing law and order would be situation enough to make a play in itself. But to ignore it as transgression is bad writing, whether in story or play.

Be human. There are mental phases, psychological aspects, which must at least be human. In a very bad play read a little while ago, a shocking murder was committed and afterward described by the principal character. Nowhere in the entire course of the drama did that character or any other in the cast display the least horror, amazement, regret, or remorse. Had he stolen a loaf of bread and devoted three acts to his efforts to escape ten days in the

lock-up, his associates could not have been more callous to his action. And they were supposedly people of breeding and education! At least, the author said so.

Be logical. In other words, be logical. It would seem almost unbelievable that errors like the examples given could occur. Yet would-be writers, demanding a public, make them constantly. Do not let the seeming harshness of this statement daunt you or turn you back; if you have really something to say, you will not be stopped so easily. It is better to make mistakes than to make nothing. Mistakes can be corrected; *nothing* merely remains zero. "If one is afraid of being proved wrong, one will never do right." The perfect play, flawless as to structure, plot, design, and presentation, has yet to be written. I do not know that I want to see it when it is. Perfection is somehow chilling. A musical composition can be erected from a certain series of notes by following the laws of Harmony and Thoroughbass. But who would care to hear it unless the composer had more in his soul than just those notes and the law!

Paul Armstrong, the dramatist, sums it up rather well: "Play-writing is half-instinct and half-experience. One must first have a story which he can tell across a table inside of ten minutes. If he can tell it in five all the better. The story must have to do with human beings. Somebody must be in danger of something, that somebody may be saved from something. I do not mean a saw-mill or hanging—

the loss of one single person's faith may be enough, but someone must be saved."

As to any set formula, listen to David Belasco: "The formula of play-writing changes every season. Year by year the dramatist is allowed less license. His skill must be greater than that of the 'veteran dramatist,' for we have advanced with the years and no longer accept that which once seemed plausible. The new dramatist is forced to move far in advance of the old, to get nearer to the truth, to the facts of life."

Be contemporaneous. Whatever your theme, it is best that your story should be contemporaneous. It will be, if you follow advice, and write only of such things and people as you yourself can understand and properly present. The reason is far-reaching. The "great American drama" will be of more value both as a description and comment to present and future Americans than any play, however well conceived and written, which deals with past, distant, or symbolical events.

CHAPTER VI

THE "CLOSET" DRAMA

A DIGRESSION—THE PRINTED PAGE AND THE ACTED PLAY—AIMING AT ONE ART BY MEANS OF ANOTHER—UNDERESTIMATING THE DIGNITY OF THE WORK—ARNOLD BENNETT'S REMARKS—BERNARD SHAW—LITERATURE IN THE THEATER—HENRY ARTHUR JONES' RULES—A FORCED CLASSIFICATION—PLAY PUBLICATION

A digression. In touching on the play written to be read and not to be acted we are dealing with a subject which is not only a digression at this point, but also a very real "digression" in play-writing. It is a matter upon which there are several opinions, and plays in manuscript frequently reach the critic which are frankly only for the publisher and not for the theater. Sir Adolphus William Ward, in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, expresses it forcibly: "Though the term literary drama is sometimes used of works kept apart from the stage, it is in truth a misnomer, since, properly speaking, no drama is such until it is acted."

The insistence upon this "misnomer's" right to live comes usually from those writers who have attracted our attention by their ability in other fields, but who profess, more or less, to despise the drama as

a sort of by-path or sidetrack of literary art, instead of the "highest and most difficult form of literature," as Henry Arthur Jones calls it. They desire to reach their public through the medium usual to themselves—the printed page, and propose to ignore the only complete medium of the drama—the theater. It cannot be done.

The printed page and the acted play. In a book, all that stands between a man and his public is the print. To insure a reading, the writer can pay for publication and give the whole edition away. A play is meant to be acted. The very word *drama* is from the Greek, *Drao*, to act, to do. The word *Play* also implies action. Therefore, even though the dramatist may have the desire to spend his money, he is compelled to consider several things before his play goes on. In a different way, he can follow the novelist's example—rent a theater from a complacent manager, pay all expenses, and invite his audiences. But between himself and the spectator is something more vital than the printed page—the whole mechanism of the theater: stage, actors, lights, scenic effects. If his material is not susceptible of such rendition through such mediums, of what use all the high-sounding phrases of a Doctor Johnson or the pointed wit of a Talleyrand! Yet there are people, otherwise cultured, who think writing a play means putting lengthy dialogue down on paper, ignoring completely this connecting link between author and public. A play, properly speaking, is not a play in its fullest expression until it has been acted; just as a

book is not entirely a book until it is in shape to be read.

The written description of any scene at which one is meant to look always falls short of the actual presentation of this silent moment as shown in the theater. There are bits of pantomime in the acted play which no description ever equaled, when such scenes are rendered with all the skill of the finished actor, assisted by adequate surroundings. When you write for the theater, you write for eyes and ears—the onlooker who sees and not the reader who visualizes for himself. There is a vast difference.

Many well-known writers have tried to uphold the closet drama as a part of dramatic literature; but, though it may be "literature," an author has no more real right to use the play-form for unactable plays than has a writer in prose to declare his compositions poetry however poetic the ideas may be. An engine built for any other than the presupposed use of engines is really a waste of materials and human energy, since an engine is only an assembled mass of various metals, until it is capable of being put to use. If it cannot "go," of what use is it?

Aiming at one art by means of another. Let me quote from *Drama and Life*, by A. B. Walkley, the dramatic critic of the London *Times:* "Mr. Hardy (i.e., Thomas Hardy) boldly champions the cause of unplayable plays. To the question, why, if you are writing a narrative to be read, forego all the privileges of narrative art and hamper yourself by the restrictions proper to a spectacle, Mr. Hardy an-

swers that is the artist's affair, and he has a right to his caprice, and the 'artistic spirit' at bottom is a 'spirit of caprice.' . . . This particular caprice of aiming by the medium of one art at the pleasure proper to another is as noxious as it is popular."

To show just how popular this "noxious" habit is, an anecdote related in an article in the *National Review*, by the late Charles H. E. Brookfield, English Censor of Plays, will be amusing: "Many years ago I was approached by an elderly Oxford professor with a packet of MS. under his arm. He confided to me that his health had some time before broken completely down through overwork. 'My medical advisers,' he said, 'ordered me to give my mind a thorough holiday; the most trifling exertion, they said, might result in meningitis. So I determined to give my brain a complete rest and I've been whiling away the time by—er—by writing a play.' I read his MS. and I saw no reason to doubt that he had conscientiously carried out his physicians' instructions; that is to say, the play he had put together betrayed no signs of any intellectual exertion whatever. But I am afraid it was never produced." Mr. Brookfield continued: "The most brilliant writer of our generation—Robert Louis Stevenson, who was endowed with almost every gift that a dramatist needs—humor, imagination, knowledge of humankind, knowledge of effect, characterization, and the power of writing beautiful dialogue—who ought to have enriched our stage with many magnificent plays, who made several attempts—was en-

tirely unsuccessful in these efforts through underestimating the dignity of the work he was undertaking. . . . Stevenson is not by any means the only illustrious man of letters who has tried in vain to woo the drama in this amused, affectionately patronizing spirit. I remember how Besant's kindly eyes used to sparkle roguishly behind his spectacles whenever he talked of play-writing; he seemed to look at it as a larky recreation akin to riding on a roundabout on Hampstead Heath."

"It is impossible for anyone, however clever he may be, to write acceptable work with his tongue in his cheek." This disposition on the part of many of the writers of fiction explains why, with a few exceptions, they have been only moderately, if at all, successful as playwrights. And it yet remains to be seen whether the works of those attaining some measure of success because of their wit and cleverness will outlast the lives of their popular authors.

The most obscure workman in the engine-room has a right to express an opinion regarding his machinery before even the most brilliant of theorists. No actor who has ever worked in a play, no director who has ever staged one, is therefore to be considered incompetent to judge whether play-construction is the amusing game which some of our cleverest satirists claim it is; or whether it is the art dignified by such names as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, and the rest, as workers in the theater believe. For that reason it may be interesting to set forth some of the opinions of these satirists. Arnold Bennett, whose novels are

always a delight to the appreciative reader, says in *The Truth About an Author:* "I have not spoken of the artistic side of this play-concoction, because it scarcely has any. . . . How our princes of the dramatic kingdom can contrive to spend two years over a single piece, as they say they do, I cannot imagine. . . . I say that dramatic composition for the market is child's play compared to the writing of decent average fiction—*provided one has an instinct for stage effect.*" The italics are mine; note well that provision, since it is important, though Mr. Bennett dismisses it so carelessly. And any writer who starts out with the idea that play-writing is child's play, will, in the vernacular, "get all that's coming to him." That a dramatist can spend two years over one piece is true, and even more time than that would describe the preparation and revision of some. The point is that they *are* dramatists.

Bernard Shaw. Bernard Shaw, in his upholding of the so-called "literary drama," takes his fling at the actor instead of the dramatist: "A 'literary play,' I should explain, is a play that the actors have to act in opposition to the 'acting play' which acts them." This is truer than Mr. Shaw meant it to be, and in a different way; many a literary play would be an impossible mixture did not the actors give it a semblance of drama by putting their best efforts into it, while the "acting play," written for the actual stage—as Shakespeare wrote—with due consideration for and knowledge of its mechanism, its limitations, its effects, and its medium of expres-

sion, acts itself, in a measure, because all of the pieces dovetail, and the players have characters to portray, not phonographic automatons. However, Norman Hapgood says of this most delightful of jesters: "The greater part of his life is devoted to proving that things ought to be done some other way."

Another statement of Mr. Bennett's shows even more clearly the attitude of the average novelist to the difficulties of play-construction. "Writing is a question of words." Is it? Let us see. Some of the most telling, most effective scenes in the drama are simple pantomime, depending on the actor's interpretation and dramatic ability and not on any dialogue of the author, though the author's directions give him his cue. The success of the motion-picture play proves that it is possible to tell a straightforward, dramatic story without the aid of words, or with only an occasional sub-title or "leader." In the drama a significant action, gesture, or facial expression is far more suggestive of the contributing emotion than the paragraph in the manuscript in which the dramatist describes such action for the instruction of actor and stage-director. In no place do actions speak louder than words more effectually than in the drama; the man who tries to make a play out of "words" will find himself on the highway of "writing," but, Mr. Bennett to the contrary, it will not be "*play*-writing." Some of the more recent sayings of this writer on the subject of the play are both dangerous and misleading to the beginner; dan-

gerous, because of his high literary standing, which tends to place him in the position of an authority, and misleading, because wide of the facts of the case.

Literature in the theater. Literature in the modern theater is not the impossibility these cavilers would seem to think. The point is that writers of the drama of each epoch were quite unconscious they were writing "literature." Posterity made the decision for them. They wrote because writing was their medium of expression; they wrote for the theater because the theater could use their plays, and the public liked them. To-day the litterateur, separating himself from the dramatist in self-conscious superiority, writes in a form which he does not understand, and which he disdains to study. When, however, the dramatist knows his form, and is gifted besides with imagination and inspiration, a successful play is the result. That it happens to be literature as well is because of this happy combination of skill and genius. *The Servant in the House* and *The Blue Bird* are usually termed literature by many of our best critics, though there is, here and there, the dissentient voice in regard to both. The personal equation enters here as elsewhere. Both were successful plays from the theatrical standpoint. Also both Charles Rann Kennedy and Maeterlinck know the theater intimately, actively. It is this active intimacy which seems to count for so little among fiction writers.

The writer who insists on the "literary" play for

the stage is in much the same position as the writer of the play meant solely for publication. Literary plays and dramatic literature are two very different things. The first insists on fine writing, as such, which, oddly enough, sounds merely didactic when spoken. And remember, the literary play for the stage must be rendered aloud by living actors before an audience just as must a play by the most ordinary craftsman. Public readers who interpret for our pleasure the great novels and poems of the masters are compelled to give due regard to a listening audience; they are forced to make extensive cuts and bridge many gaps by a few short sentences. Even if the author desires stage production for his effort, the literary play, in itself, is not much better than the purely closet drama. Because, even if it is capable of presentation by actors in a theater, the audience has been ignored. The play of this stamp is simply not dramatic. It is only dialogue, no matter how well written: in the same class with those "pieces" three or four of us used to recite at school entertainments, capable of being rendered aloud from a platform, but not dramatic because lacking in the first requisite of the theater—entertainment for an audience. "Fine writing" in the theater is not necessarily undesirable, but it must be backed by craftsmanship and conform as completely to the laws of entertainment as must the play of the merest "pot-boiler."

The way to bring literature to the stage is not by way of the closet-drama, which is merely a mis-

taken effort to bring the stage to literature. Nor is it to be done by way of the revivals of old literary dramas and dramatic forms, but rather along modern lines of realism, or the love of the unusual and the mystical. "If there is any literary drama, it is the drama our contemporaries are laughing at, or crying over, or declaring is a true picture of their lives," says Walter Pritchard Eaton. Revivals of old forms—let us confess it—are apt to bore any but scholars, and deaden even more effectually the desire for literary drama in those ordinary playgoers who pay for their seats and fill the box-office treasury. Many insist that the old forms are best; and occasionally when one hears the rounded periods and sonorous rhythm of one of the old dramas, one feels inclined to agree. But with the changes in the stage, and the evolution of theatrical machinery these methods have grown more and more unnatural.

Therefore, though for one reason or another your composition may never see the footlights, write it as if you expected it to be produced and acted immediately.

Henry Arthur Jones' rules. Henry Arthur Jones, in his latest publication, *The Foundations of a National Drama*, half seriously, half humorously makes the following list of rules for "Dramatic Literature" on the modern stage:

"1. The writer must have some natural instinct for the stage, some inborn gifts for the theater.

"2. He must patiently learn the technique of the stage.

"3. His literature must inform a strong, moving, universal story.

"4. His literature must be so broad and human that it can be instantly apprehended and digested by the boys in the gallery.

"5. His literature must be so subtle and delicate that it will tickle the palates of literary critics in the stalls.

"6. His literature—in a play of modern life—must be of that supreme quality which is constantly and naturally spoken by all classes of English men and women in everyday life; it must be obviously and frankly colloquial.

"7. His literature must exactly fit the mouths, and persons, and manners, and training of the various members of the company who are to deliver it.

"8. His literature must be of that kind which will immediately bring at least eight hundred pounds a week to the box-office."

A forced classification. Please do not, I beg of you, misunderstand the position taken by those who so strenuously object to the "unactable" play. There is no intention to decry, as literature, any of the great poetic dialogues. Literature of a high order they most certainly are. But "literature of the theater" they are not, however beautiful their form and language. I repeat, these strictures are directed solely against the writer who composes a "drama" in which he either deliberately or ignorantly ignores the stage, and writes solely for the eyes of the reader.

There is, unfortunately, a very fine class of real drama which, in the United States, might be called by the unthinking, "Closet-Drama." But it is a forced and not a real classification. It was written for the theater, is capable of practical theatrical presentation, and because of a manager's timidity or lack of initiative, or a public's lack of dramatic education or knowledge that there is another kind of play to be had than those they are compelled to witness, is still to be had only in book-form. But more and more of these plays are reaching their ultimate, the stage, through the efforts of private enterprise and special audiences. Fortunately, the reading of published plays is on the increase. And with the entrance into book-form of real dramatic literature, there will be less and less ignoring of dramatic ethics on the part of writers unwilling to see where the difference lies.

Plays, real plays, should be published. It amounts to a duty for managers, playwrights, and publishers, to see that they are. To say nothing of the advantages of founding a permanent dramatic literature in America, it will be of the greatest service not only to the student, but to the playgoer who for any reason has been unable to see any particular play. The theater is a very general topic of conversation; being able to read a play will certainly add to the intelligence and enjoyment of such discussion.

CHAPTER VII

TECHNIQUE

DIFFICULT TO DEFINE—RULE ONE: KNOWLEDGE OF THE THEATER—RULE TWO: THE PLOT—PRELIMINARY MENTAL PROCESS—SCENARIO—UNITY OF THE PLOT—THE REASONS—SCOPE OF THEATRICAL PRESENTATION—ICONOCLASTIC INCLINATION—READING THE PLAY TO FRIENDS—STORY TOLD BY MEANS OF PLAYERS AND STAGE-SETTING—STAGE-TRICKS—TECHNICAL PERFECTION—GOOD SENSE

Difficult to define. The technique of an art which differs so widely in treatment and expression under the hands of its various exponents is difficult to define. Any instructions on play-building must necessarily contain a number of rules of what *not* to do, though some writers on the subject feel such negative instruction hardly worth while. Rules of any kind fall into their proper place when one has mastered an art; for the novice, obedience to rules is a help and a safeguard.

Rule one. Knowledge of the theater. Before starting to write your play, inform yourself on all those matters included in the theater, some of which I have already mentioned. This might be called Rule One. Henry Arthur Jones said in an interview, when asked why so few tyros proved themselves

worthy of the managerial welcome: "Because they are so ignorant of the task they impose upon themselves. Dramatic writing is more beset with difficulties than is any other form of authorship imaginable. Nevertheless, the amateur rushes boldly in and storms the managerial office, before he has mastered the very rudiments of his craft. Nobody starts to build a house without a course of previous training, yet hundreds of people start to write plays with no better acquaintance with the details of play-construction than a man might gain of house-construction in a few casual glances at the outside of one." Lewis Waller, the well-known English actor, adds to this: "There is a technique of the theater, a technique of play-writing and acting that can only be acquired by laborious experience." If you can write plays, if you are really an embryo dramatist, you will not write just the one play which has set you searching books, and rules, and theaters, but another, and another, until you know your work.

I will add one more quotation at this point, because it comes from a woman who conducts one of the largest play-bureaus in America, and who in her reading of thousands of MSS. from almost every city, town, and village in the country is peculiarly fitted to judge how much both the preceding quotations are needed, and how little they are heeded. Elizabeth Marbury says: "Lack of technique is the difficulty with many of the American playwrights. It is not that they cannot master it, but either they

think they have it as a gift needing no cultivation, or that it is not worth while."

A definition. Technique, in the dictionary, is described as the manner of artistic performance. For instance, in piano playing, technique includes the ability to rapidly transfer, through the eyes, brain, and fingers, the notes of the musical composition to the keyboard: the knowledge of the correct position of the hands, the skill of the finger movements, the complete acquaintance with every sign and symbol of expression marked in the score. All of this is purely mechanical and is acquired as the result of hour upon hour of actual labor. Not one of these matters is ignored by a Paderewski or a Carreno, any more than by the plodding student. The difference in the resulting performance is dependent on three things—work, temperament, and individuality.

The technique of play-writing is not so literally set down. Except for the medium, there is no definite standard. Yet, as in music, we have the ability to transcribe the life we see and know into the life we put on the stage, the knowledge of the correct way of going to work, the skill with which the work is done, the acquaintance with all the signs and mechanics of the theater.

A dangerous half-truth. Certain playwrights who have in a manner " arrived " will airily affirm: " Have a good story, a good plot, and technique will take care of itself." It is a careless and dangerous saying to present to the laity because only half a truth. It is like saying: Speak the language, and rules

of grammar will take care of themselves. Of course they will, once they have become a part of one's subconscious processes. Writers who make such careless statements forget the period in which they learned or unconsciously absorbed the rules. Perhaps a large part of the technique of the theater is a technique which its most successful exponents have taken in so unconsciously and gradually as hardly to realize there is such a thing. But this can be true only of those writers who in some way or other know the theater. When a playwright makes both statements—that technique takes care of itself, and a knowledge of the theater is unnecessary, as one playwright did not long ago—he confesses himself one who is unconscious of how much of this knowledge he actually possesses, because he has never tried to give it a name, and because he learned it all without knowing he had done so. The trouble with the writers who make this statement seems to be that they use the word *technique* as if it meant a formula or a recipe. A formula no more makes a playwright than a cook-book creates a chef.

Rule two. The story. In the chapters relating to the story, we had something to say of the ability to transfer the lives around us to the stage. Therefore, this would be the next rule or requisite: have your story clear in your mind before you start to work. Mr. Archer says there are no rules for writing a play; in a strict sense this is true. Yet, as you see, rules of a kind there are, which are part of this matter of technique. Two have already been

formulated, the second of which is: have a definite tale to tell. You cannot start a play without, though some people try.

Preliminary thinking. In a recent symposium held in a leading New York paper, nine well-known dramatists gave their methods of procedure. These varied with the individuality and temperament of the writers. But on one point they were all agreed: the importance of the clearness of the plot or story before beginning the actual work of writing the play. In some cases this was allowed to roll around in the brain for a year before any writing was done, beyond, perhaps, the entries made in some note-book to help the memory until the entire matter was formulated. Sometimes a certain character suggested the story in which he was to move; at others, the story brought a troop of characters marching and counter-marching, some to stay and grow, others to fade out and be rejected. But this preliminary mental process seemed to preface the work of all of them.

This method, however, is not so easy to the unpracticed novice. All these writers were trained by experience, and able to hold a story in mind, to digest it, as it were, and then start to work with a fairly clear idea of the resulting scenario. One writer of the nine went so far as to absolutely repudiate a written scenario. But he has the gift of being able to hold his mental story very clearly: "Before I actually begin to write a play my characters are so real to me that I know what they look like, what their

voices sound like, what sort of clothes they wear, where they stand or sit as they say or do what I make them say or do."

Scenario. It is to help the novice make his story real, his characters alive, that I have suggested the writing of the episode as a story in prose. Sometimes one is unaware how slim a narrative he is preparing to dramatize until he presents it to himself in this way. The story of a very poor four-act drama read in manuscript was briefly summarized by the critic thus: a clergyman was in love with a married woman, though he had never told her and she did not suspect. Before the end of the first act, the husband was killed in an accident, off-stage. She promised to marry the clergyman in Act Four. That was all. There were no obstacles, no complications, no plot; certainly, there was no theme. Had the writer put it all down on paper, he could not have helped but note the futility of his story. That the original situation held possibilities of drama he either had not noticed or had ignored, as was shown by his so early and easily putting the husband out of the way.

Unity of plot: rule three. The next feature of play-technique is the "one-ness," the unity, of the plot. Unity of time and place are frequently set aside; the unity of action, the singleness of episode is steadily growing more and more of an exaction.

In a modern drama, every character, every situation and complication, every line of the dialogue

must deal with this one plot. There are no cunning little by-paths leading nowhere. All must lead up to that final curtain by gradual, inevitable degrees—a succession of dramatic actions or incidents moving definitely forward to the climax.

Reasons. There must be a reason for every person, line, and situation in your play; this point cannot be too much emphasized. Remembering it will stop you when you are inclined to permit your characters to do unnecessary things. Suppose, for example, you want to get a certain character off the stage so that certain other characters may be in a position for a scene which the first person must not hear. He must have a reason for leaving which will be apparent or obvious to the audience; he cannot wander aimlessly out. He does not necessarily have to say anything in explanation; he may be just a servant going about his duties, or a guest following others to another room to smoke, or play cards, or speak to someone: anything, so long as there is a legitimate reason, spoken or implied, for him to exit.

From ancient Greece comes down the dictum, which good taste has seen no reason to change. It is strikingly true of play-writing to-day. Thus Aristotle: "The fable, since it is an imitation action, should be the imitation of one action, and of the whole of this, and that the parts of the transactions should be so arranged that any one of them being transposed or taken away, the whole would become different and changed. For that which when present

or not present produces no sensible difference is not a part of the fabric."

Scope of theatrical presentation. You must keep your actions—the crimes, or accidents, or happenings—within the scope of theatrical presentation. Percy Mackaye speaks of this as writing a practical play: i.e., "A play likely to be produced." Wonderful things are done in stagecraft in these days of mechanical device, but it is as well for the novice to wait for some experience in his art before writing a play which would practically require the reconstruction of all that part of the house back of the curtain. It takes skill to put unusual situations into their proper place in a play. The manager always feels he is taking a chance with the unknown writer; if to this chance be added unnecessary expense for unusual scenic contrivances, he is not exactly to be blamed for refusing to take the risk.

Iconoclastic inclination. To have daring ideas, iconoclastic inclination, may make for striking originality, but go slowly until you have mastered something of your medium. The two Richards—Wagner and Strauss—invented new instruments for new tones, *but* they thoroughly understood the old ones. You may become great enough to smash old methods, but you must first pass through the school. Wagner wrote *Rienzi,* on old accepted lines, long before, in *Parsifal,* he brought the *leit-motif* to perfection. The great sometimes disregard technique, in all the arts. It is not well, in writing for the theater, to go too far in this iconoclasm, else you will find

yourself at odds with all the paraphernalia included within the theater's four walls. As artist, architect, and sculptor passed through the schools of art to acquire the knowledge necessary for the use of their tools, so must musician, actor, and playwright pass through the schools of practice and experience before using their tools.

You say, very properly, that the fact of your situation being unusual should be in its favor, since I have already advocated novelty. I am merely advising letting such situations alone until you are sure that you—and the stage-director—can handle them. Write your play, not once, but dozens of times, if need be. Put it away for a while; give yourself time to forget it a little, then go at it again. Artists in painting and illustrating know the value of this method. Mistakes you had not noticed, or had glossed over in the fever of writing, will shriek at you from the pages.

Reading the play to friends. Another word of warning might just as well find its place here, since the practice actually retards the grasp of technique and delays the day of real accomplishment. Do not be in haste to read your play to friends and admirers the moment you have written the final words of your last scene in your first transcript. Better read it to an enemy: you will be more likely to get criticism worth while. If you are so fortunate as to number among your friends someone connected with the theater who is honest enough to tell you the truth, as he sees it, you will be really helped,

even if the remarks are caustic. I know of nothing more pernicious in its effect on the amateur writer than the habit, so prevalent, of reading a first play to an invited group of non-theatrical, non-literary friends. A practiced writer may receive valuable criticism from an "outsider," though the latter's remarks are delivered without consciousness of the train of thought they may evoke in the author. And sometimes after an amateur has had expert opinion, a remark from someone else may chance to be of value. But no amateur ever received valuable or *practical* criticism from such an audience as I have described—chiefly for the reason that it takes certain faculties to listen to a play intelligently. If one lacks, for instance, the power of "staging" or picturing a play in action as he listens to the reading of it in a drawing-room, your effort is wasted. And this picture-making faculty is not given to everyone.

How the story is told: rule four. Another sign of an expert in technique is the ability with which he causes his story to be simply and clearly told by the players and the stage-setting, without one unnecessary word or obtrusion from the author. Wherever we are made to feel that the writer is himself speaking, it is because of faulty construction. The illusion that the actors are in truth the characters they aim to portray and that these characters alone are speaking, must be held in the minds of the audience. If it is not, it may be the actor's fault; it should never be the author's. There is but one way in

which the dramatist can identify himself with the play: he can make one of his characters a photographic representation of himself. Otherwise if a character stops being John Smith for a few moments so that the author may launch some views which may have to do with the play, but which have no real relation to John Smith, it is bad character-drawing if it is nothing else. Bernard Shaw stops the entire action of *Fanny's First Play* to let a French officer deliver a lengthy speech about Englishwomen. But, with Shaw's plays, it so happens that his admirers are more interested in him than in any of his characters, so perhaps *he* may be pardoned the transgression.

Stage-tricks. We often speak of stage-tricks. Perhaps mention of these is out of place in a book intended for novices, for the simple reason that it takes an experienced craftsman to make use of a trick in writing or stage-direction. In the hands of the beginner the usage is apt to stand out glaringly from the rest of the drama. As a warning, however, the mention is not inept. There are many such tricks; they are only obvious as "tricks" when they are unnatural, plainly theatrical. A clever stage-trick, utilized naturally and properly, has its dramatic uses.

Tricks of other days have been steadily and gradually forced out of the drama because they have been caused generally by the intrusions of the author in prologues, epilogues, and other explanatory matter. The monologue is an old theatrical trick discarded

because of its unnaturalness. A clever, legitimate trick, which told without words and in the briefest space of time something the dramatist wished us to known at once, was shown in the first act finale of *Phroso*, dramatized from the Anthony Hope novel. Lord Wheatley has had a short scene with his fiancée, with whom he has imagined himself very much in love. She has given him a rose, which he puts in his coat. Later he has a scene with the tempestuous Greek beauty, the Lady Euphrosyne, who stabs his hand with her dagger. At the end of the act, as the Greek is passing across a gallery at the back of the stage, Lord Wheatley takes the rose from his coat and half unconsciously smells it. Euphrosyne, or Phroso, turns suddenly and leans over the gallery to say softly, "My lord, I am—sorry—for that," pointing to his wounded hand. His back is to the audience, his arm has dropped to his side at her first words, the rose dangling from his fingers. As Phroso finishes her speech and turns, passing along the gallery to her room, Lord Wheatley, with lifted head, follows her movement, still standing in the same position. There is no sign of any emotion on the part of either player; but—the forgotten rose falls slowly from his fingers to the stage, as the curtain descends. That is all. Could a long, rapturous speech on his part have told us any more, or with half the effect? Said Mr. Brookfield: "No one can afford to dispense with the 'tricks of the trade.' But the artist must learn to practice them so skillfully that the audience are beguiled into think-

ing their effects are produced by entirely new and original means."

Technical perfection. With all that has been said both here and elsewhere about technique in playwriting, remember always that mere technical perfection in any art is empty. The great teachers of music and painting have sometimes been inferior performers. A play built up of theatrical traditions, stage-tricks, and dramatic formalism will not be a great play. But the writing of such a play by the student should be a help to him in learning something of the work before him. Do not be afraid of technique as something either too difficult to grasp or too hampering on originality. Master it—do not let it master you.

Good sense. Though the following is written of prose composition, it is so plainly pertinent to the subject under discussion that it makes a most fitting close to this matter of technique:

"No principle of composition is anywhere absolute; . . . the finest art is imperceptible. . . . Principle is not rule; it is a guide, not a master. To neglect it is to go astray; to follow it blindly is to know not where you are. Above all principle, above all else, the deepest secret of all fine art is fine good sense." *

* *English Composition*, Barrett Wendell.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHARACTERS

CLEARNESS — ATTRIBUTES — COMPLEXITY — ELIMINATION OF A CHARACTER — UNMANAGEABLE CHARACTERS — RELATION TO THE PLOT — RELATION TO EACH OTHER — THE CONFIDANT — "THE SPY" — "THE NEW SIN" — IRRITATING PERSONALITY — INTRODUCTION OF NEW CHARACTERS — CHARACTERS SUITED TO THE ACTIONS THEY MUST COMMIT — GENEALOGY OF IMAGINARY CHARACTERS — CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS IN THE PLAY — CHARACTER NAMES — UNUSUAL CHARACTERIZATIONS — STRAIGHT PARTS — CHARACTER PARTS — CHARACTER CHANGES

Having settled on your story, you must now determine how many and what characters will be necessary to tell it. The fewer characters used, the better; the reasons, of which there are several, will present themselves from time to time in later chapters, when we discuss the different phases of composition.

Clearness. "The portrayal of a human character is the highest achievement of which any artist is capable," says Henry Arthur Jones. No better text could be found for this chapter. Each character, therefore, must be fairly clear in your mind before starting your play. If, by the time it is finished, you do not feel that these are living people whom you

have grown to know intimately, you have failed in characterization. During the preliminary process of thinking and planning, of plotting story and scenario, even in the actual writing of the dialogue, they have a way of growing and changing under one's hand. In the end they must be clean-cut. Since very human actors must portray them, the nearer your creations come to clear definition, the better chances for correct rendition your play will have. In a story you can explain your characters at length or in a few paragraphs; in a play, the actor must do it for you with what you give him to do and say.

Attributes. In a way, character delineation can never be microscopic in the play. Just as a portrait portrays the sitter in one mood, the character drawing in a play touches only those points of the personality which concern the story. In real life no bad man is always thinking wicked thoughts or planning worse acts, nor is every good man always above reproach. We are neither angels nor devils. But in the play it serves our purpose better to use just those sides of a personality which will present the action without confusion either in delineation or comprehension. We are dealing with some particular crisis in the life of an imagined personality. Art demands therefore that we show, not the whole of that character's possibilities in every phase of existence from dawn to dark, but only those characteristics which are consistent with our story and its presentation. In handling a first play, it is easier to make the people in it entirely simple in delineation

as in the old days when hero and villain, heroine and adventuress never deviated for a moment from their virtue or wickedness, as the case might be. Even in plays of these latter days, though the characters more nearly conform to the ordinary traits of normal human beings, the several attributes which brought the characters into the story are clearly marked. Sometimes this is overdone to the point of creating types rather than human beings. Since no one is entirely true to any one type, such character drawings, no matter how witty or charming the lines given the personalities, show up on the stage, when acted, as unnatural, sometimes exaggerated almost to the allegorical. Consistency is much, but it must not be carried to the point of mannerism.

Complexity. If I may seem paradoxical, even a complex character must be consistently complex. And, as they are sure to stand out in a performance, the complex characters must usually be the more important ones; as an actor would express it, there is so much "meat" in them. Many a dramatist has found a character which he considered unimportant running away with his play because the actor found it so worthy of his best efforts. Even Shakespeare had to kill Mercutio very early in *Romeo and Juliet*. Actors know why—especially the man playing Romeo.

Elimination. An experience of A. E. Thomas, as told by himself, will illustrate this difficulty: "Now and then one has to sacrifice a scene or character for strange reasons. One such character was entirely eliminated from *The Rainbow* because it was

too good. This character, intended to be merely in the background of the main story, developed so strongly in the acting that it was ultimately decided that it seriously obscured and weakened the original theme. Eliminating this character deeply disappointed the actress who played it. But there was no help for it."

Unmanageable characters. Sometimes a character cannot so easily be eliminated, and becomes unmanageable. At the end of the play, the dramatist finds himself with the emphasis all in the wrong place because of this character's domination. If you can always keep in mind the fact that you are writing parts that actors will portray, you will find your opinion of the relative values of your characters much changed. Though a personality may seem of slight importance on the written page, it becomes something very different when clothed in flesh and blood. A striking instance of this came to my notice a short time ago. The writer had had considerable experience as a writer of prose and of many one-act plays. But this was the first attempt at a drama of length. As her central figure she had mentally determined on a young woman of force and aptitude. As a contrast, she had created a villain of a very black dye indeed. But—and I do not believe the author yet knows just how it happened—this villain was distinctly picturesque, and actually "hogged the show." Throughout the play he was consistent, frequently amusing—a character part that any of our foremost character-actors would

have reveled in playing. The curious part of it was, when the suggestion was made to the author that she re-write her play so as to make this the central figure, she declared she could not do it—that she would alter the play so as to build up the heroine. And so, a splendid acting character, and the possibility of an exceedingly entertaining play, will be lost in a much more conventional structure because the author is really half afraid of her own picturesque monster —unless she has changed her mind.

Relation to the plot and to each other. In a properly constructed play, the characters must have relation not only to the plot, but to each other. Except in certain rural plays, where they are necessary as types or " atmosphere," the character, no matter how clever or funny, who has nothing to do with the outcome of the story has no place in the play. And even the " type " is used as a medium to tell some of the developments. He may be just funny, or just " atmosphere " most of the time, but there comes a moment in the play when he serves his definite purpose.

The confidant. As we know, the monologue is a bad theater trick. As playwrights began to half sense its falsity, they cast around for some means to obviate its apparent necessity. Certain information, certain emotions, must be conveyed to the audience. The monologue was unnatural, therefore the " confidant " became a character in many plays. This was a personage of either sex whose sole purpose in the piece was to be on hand to listen to all

the stories, feelings, and ideas the hero or heroine wished to express, and for which the inexpert dramatist knew no other method of revelation. There are still plays in which the leading character has a bosom friend to whom he talks more freely than to the others. Since that is an entirely natural state of affairs in real life, there can be no objection. But, this character is made to serve other purposes in the play, has an active relationship to the plot beyond his confidential capacity. The ever-present telephone is a useful invention which in many cases does away with the need for either monologue or confidant. If you use a character of this nature, see to it, then, that he is a personality and not a mere feeder for another rôle.

"The Spy." In a play where the personages are inspired by their emotions, these emotions becoming the mainspring of action and characterization, there will be no real necessity for the discussion of their feelings with others, beyond an ordinary, legitimate expression or confession of thought or mood. In Henri Kistemacker's play, *The Spy*, there is an adroit, dramatic use made of the "confidant," who in this case is a priest. To no other could the heroine speak with as much cause as to this character. Though he serves no other especial purpose in the drama, the "trick" is never noticeable. We must know Monique's reasons for her intentions. They lie back over so long a stretch of time that only in this way can they reach us. Her childhood friend and confessor is the natural recipient of her confidences.

In this connection, I have no reference to one character telling another something the audience must know. It is only when the other character plays no other part than that of a mere listener and adviser that legitimate reasons must be found for his presence in the plot, and this takes skill. Kistemacker managed it well and unobtrusively.

"The New Sin." If your characters are human, flesh-and-blood personalities, you will easily find a use for their being, since the average human listener to any confidence of great import is inspired with a desire to make use of it, either to help or hurt the other. In *The New Sin*, the hero tells his two pals of his intolerable situation, and tells it at some length. Neither of his listeners is a mere "confidant" in the obnoxious dramatic meaning of the term, since both are characters of almost equal importance with the hero in the development of the story.

Irritating personality. A mistake made all too frequently by writers of stories as well as of plays is the creation of an irritating personality. Your hero or heroine may be unpleasant, wicked—anything but aggravating. Even successful writers make this blunder—and blunder it certainly is because of its effect. Several years ago a play went on in New York which was exceedingly clever; in fact, *The Mollusc* is one of the decade's really fine plays; yet one came away dissatisfied, vaguely annoyed. Why? Because one had spent an hour and a half in the society of a woman from whom one would ordinarily have fled in ten minutes—or else slapped her. Sev-

eral years ago, a dramatist, experienced enough to have known better, presented as his heroine a girl for whom one finally lost all sympathy in a desire to shake her for her silliness. The part was well-played by an actress who seemed to have full comprehension of the reasons back of the girl's notions. Yet I well remember that at a certain point in the dialogue of the last act of *The Harvest Moon*, by which time the audience should have taken the girl to its heart if it ever intended doing so, a woman seated near me gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders and that unspellable little click of the tongue and teeth so expressive of annoyance.

Sometimes a character may be of this irritating variety to point a contrast, but the audience should be given the satisfaction of seeing him given his just deserts. The public, *en masse*, is always virtuous and likes to see its unpleasant people punished in some way. An audience wishes to either have the villain reform, or be punished, or, at best, "foiled" in his attempt on the unhappiness of others. This feeling is entirely natural and not to be lightly ignored without some risk. Other things in the play must overbalance any failure in this direction. An example comes to mind in that very successful play, *As a Man Thinks*, in which a neglect of just retribution is glossed by the skill in play-writing and the motive of the play itself. But many unregenerate in the audience—and I think the author would be surprised at the number whenever this play came up for discussion—were so disgusted and irritated by the

detestable character in question that they could see no reason why he should have been given the opportunity at the end to assume the magnanimously forgiving attitude of the hero in a melodrama. I know personally of people who deliberately stayed away from the performance because of a dislike to being further "riled" than they had been by the mere reading of the reviews of the play's story. The splendid acting of all the characters served to take away *some* of this annoyance at the actual performance.

This matter of unpleasant characters must be handled very carefully. A certain manager once expressed himself thus forcibly: "If I haven't at least two characters in a piece an audience can love, I don't produce the play." We will speak again of the enormous part an audience's desires and likings may play in your drama.

New characters. I have spoken of the elimination of characters sometimes as late as after the first performance of the play. It has happened more than once that a new character is introduced at the same late period. In *The Lady from Oklahoma*, three characters were introduced after the out-of-town opening. So you see how broad must be the rule to have your characters well in mind from the beginning. Their individuality must in no way prevent your deletion of one or several, nor your supplanting of any with another and totally different personality.

Characters suited to necessary actions. If you wish a certain act committed or a certain situation created, you must devise a character or characters

which would under the circumstances bring those events to pass. You cannot outrage the probabilities by making your people do things which would be utterly contrary to the personalities you have shown. This is so important that some writers go to considerable lengths in making sure that the character is in every way consistent. One writer takes a long sheet of paper, and on this he traces back the genealogy of his imaginary hero—his birthplace, his parents' names and characteristics, their birthplaces, and so on—until he has to his own satisfaction created progenitors and environment that would have brought forth his character. I know of another case where the authors of a play took an imaginary personality to a friend interested in astrology, and, giving her certain salient characteristics, said: "Under what signs would such a man be born and what would be his other habits of thought and action?" The friend was both amused and excited and went to work; presently the man had a birthday and a horoscope. This was done with several other characters and the result was interesting. The old astrologers knew a thing or two of human nature—certainly, in respect to those propensities which "went together"; this was proven by the fact that each of the characters in that play was alive and as nearly as possible true to his own nature.

Character descriptions. But these little methods of arriving at definition of character must be for yourself. Unless some dramatic purpose is served by the information, the audience cares only about

the result—the character they see. A young novice who evidently had some such plan in mind put the information, not in her play, but in her preliminary description in the cast of characters. Her hero had a New England mother and a far-Western father. This was the excuse for certain traits of disposition. But not once in the course of the play could the audience guess the facts, as the excuse was never made audible. Had anyone said in extenuation of certain Puritanical ideas, "His mother was from New England," the information would have had due weight. The audience see the man as he is and the deeds he commits; they are not trying to cast back into the years to wonder whether he had an Irish mother and a Dutch father. Nor, if you do not make active use of these facts as drama, do they care. Such material has value only to you as creator; it has no place in your play-manuscript. It may also save you from the criticism I once heard thrown at a certain play: "The author did not know his own characters—they just happened."

Names. In naming your characters, do not have two names in the cast of a similar sound or appearance, unless you have dramatic intention in the resemblance. It only causes confusion.

Suit the names to the characters: not to the extreme of the old writers, but with seeming naturalness. For instance, do not call a butler Clarence or Lionel, or a pert *demi-mondaine* Mary, unless you mean to make dramatic or humorous use of the inappropriateness of the name. Avoid either extreme.

The simplest way is to give your characters such names as they might bear were they alive and numbered among your acquaintances. True, people in real life are often cursed with inappropriate names. That need not be your mistake. Be human, without being either grotesque or bromidic. Not all Irishmen are called Patrick nor all Frenchmen Alphonse. Rupert Hughes, author of *Excuse Me*, makes an excellent and helpful suggestion, with a closing remark pertinent at this point: "The selection of names for characters is an exciting process. There are few books that make more fascinating reading than a telephone book. In selecting labels for characters, I try to avoid literary names for the serious people and burlesque names for the flippant."

Unusual appearance. So much for your character-personalities and their designations. In your mind's eye they have also a certain physical appearance. With moderation, you have a right to state clearly what this appearance is. By "moderation," I mean that you must remember that such descriptions will not be slavishly followed by the producing manager, unless the story itself calls for such presentation of the part. For instance, you may see your heroine in your mind as a blonde with blue eyes. Unless her blonde hair plays a part in the drama—as Hilda in *The Wolf*, "a Swede wi' her yeller hair"—your description is only suggestive and not autocratic. So with the men. It is not necessary to describe them beyond their probable ages and general appearance as short or tall, thin or fat; also, you

may suggest some trait of manner, as suave, or impudent, or shallow, which will give the keynote to the proper portrayal. Of course, with certain character-parts (individuals of distinct or eccentric personality) you may, if you wish, describe the appearance from the crown of the head to the toes. It helps the actor's make-up.

A few character descriptions from a play of Henry Arthur Jones will show something of how far you may go. His heroine is simply described: "She is in widow's mourning; about twenty-five years of age, with fascinating, coquettish manner." A servant is described as "bald, stout, about forty-five." The baldness here is merely a suggestion. Since no mention is made of the butler's baldness by anyone throughout the play, the manager may or may not insist upon it, according to the actors under salary on his list. It, however, lends "character" to the man's appearance, and the chances are very much for the author's direction being carried out—at least, in the performances of the original company.

On the other hand, here is a character description that would in all probability be exactly followed by director and actor in appearance and performance: "a thin, pale, weedy, nervous, unhealthy-looking little man about thirty-five, very short-sighted, precise, fidgetty, excitable, waspish, narrow, sincere, with a constant habit of nervously washing his hands, and a painfully earnest manner." Another character is simply described as "a very distinguished-looking man about sixty; affable, shrewd, well-bred."

You will notice that the so-called " straight " parts are left much to the discretion of the producer, while the " character " parts are more fully described.

In a clever play criticised some little time ago, the hero, a man of about forty, was given a beard by the author. Some of the remarks I made at the time as to the reasons why such a description or suggestion was needless will be of use here: " If the beard serves no especial purpose of characterization, there are several reasons against it. If you had ever been on the stage and had to attach *and remove* a false beard, you would understand why the actor so strenuously objects to wearing one unless his part actually demands it. A young man playing the part of an old one will assume a beard to help out his lack of years. Frequently an actor playing a physician, or a judge, or some such character, will put on a beard to add dignity and a certain immobility to the actor's otherwise plastic features. For general use in juvenile or leading parts the beard is not worn, for the very simple reason that it disguises and makes difficult facial expression. It has, therefore, come only to be used in character parts as an assistance to make-up. Sometimes a leading man will wear a beard through part of a play to show a long illness, or to express any other cause for his being unshaven (in Act One of *Tit for Tat,* the hero was careless about his appearance; and in Act One of *An American Widow* the leading man had been in the wilds for some time), but it is generally discarded before the end of the play. The beard on a character's face

as directed by the author must have as specific reason for existence in these days of clean-shaven men as any other part of the dramatic construction."

The preceding will fit any other unusual characterization you may have in mind. Remembering it will prevent you from filling up your manuscript with unnecessary descriptions.

Character changes. Your characters now have personality, names, and appearance. Says John Galsworthy in an article in the *Fortnightly Review:* "The dramatist's license ends with his design. In conception alone is he free. He may take what characters or groups of characters he chooses, see them with what eyes, knit them with what idea, within the limits of his temperament. Once taken, seen, and knitted, he is bound to treat them like a gentleman, with the tenderest consideration of their mainsprings."

Characters change and grow as do human beings. It is your task, as their creator, to see that they remain consistent, probable, possible.

CHAPTER IX

THE ACTOR, HIS DIRECTOR, AND HIS AUDIENCE

THE FOUR RULES—THE DESIRED EFFECT—THE AUDIENCES—STAGE-MANAGER AND STAGE-DIRECTOR—BLUE-PENCILING—THE ACTORS—GOOD PARTS—PLAYS FOR PARTICULAR ACTORS—THE ACTOR'S OPPORTUNITIES

Four rules. Thus far, we have formulated four rules—all of them as apparently self-evident as the historic recipe for hare-soup. First, know your medium, the theater; second, have a clear story to tell; third, be sure this story is "single" in plot; fourth, learn how to tell your story through your medium. Our "fourthly" is only another way of saying, write your play by whatever rules of technique you have mastered until practice has taught you how to do it.

The desired effect. There is still another matter to be taken into account before you feel your medium is in a manner under your fingers: that is, the effect you desire to produce. It has been said here that in prose writing you may write what and how you please, offend sensibilities and opinions, break rules of technique at your own will, publish your book yourself and give it away. But in so doing you will have offended against one canon of

good writing, left out of your calculations one important consideration—the effect upon your readers. If you do not care whether anyone reads what you write, well and good. But most people write to convince others of certain matters, to interest them in special subjects, to amuse them, or for no better reason than the mercenary one of getting them to buy the book. Consciously or unconsciously, we desire to produce a certain effect, else we are writing nothing but words. So universally recognized an authority as Professor Barrett Wendell, of Harvard University, speaks again and again of this matter of the effect to be achieved.

The audience. In play-writing, this effect is produced by actors, under stage direction, on an audience. Therefore, remember your audiences. Think of them. Will this point be clear? Will they understand why I did this? Shall I have to go into lengthy explanations in that matter? Will a word express this emotion or will a gesture do it better? Will it "get over"? These are questions even the experienced playwright asks himself. *How* these effects are produced will be dealt with as clearly as can be managed, when we sit down to begin work on the scenario, and start the actual writing of the play. Just now we will devote a little time to the actor, his stage-director, and his audience, since these are matters, along with the mechanism of the theater and the technique of writing, which the experienced playwright takes into account. They are included in the comprehensive knowledge of his craftsmanship.

Stage-manager and director. There is some slight difference in meaning in the two terms, stage-manager and stage-director, as used in the theater, though the terms are used interchangeably by the layman. The stage-director is the man who plans the scenic arrangements, contrives the bringing together of all integral parts of the drama, and directs all rehearsals. He is in the position of the orchestra leader. The stage-manager is the man detailed to "remember" all the director's instructions. He is constantly with the company, while the director's work is frequently finished after the play has had its opening, and all is in good running order. The stage-manager sees that the stage is properly "set" for every performance, that the actors are in their places at the proper time, and that they keep up to the mark in their several parts. If there is any evidence of slacking up, or if a change is made in the cast, he it is who calls and directs rehearsals along the lines laid down by the original director. Every company has its own stage-*manager*. One stage-*director* may have rehearsed three or four different companies. Sometimes this director is the author of the play, sometimes he is the actor or actress playing the leading or "star" part. Oftenest, he is a man who does nothing else. Most of the large theatrical firms have a general stage-director, whose duty it is to engage the companies for the various plays to be produced by his firm, and oversee, if not actually direct, all rehearsals. He usually has several subordinate directors who follow

his instructions. The playwright's business is, therefore, mostly concerned with the stage-director rather than the stage-manager.

An actually necessary qualification of the stage-director is the almost psychic ability to understand and appraise the personalities and idiosyncrasies of the players. Each actor brings something of his own to the part he plays, for good or ill. He must be brought into line with the desired result without spoiling his individual performance. It is in this regard of making due allowance for the personality of each player that David Belasco excels as a stage-director.

A good director studies the play in manuscript until he is thoroughly in sympathy and understanding with the dramatist's intentions. He sees every character not as a single part, but in its relation to the play as a whole. No actor, however clever, is left entirely to himself to move at will through his surroundings. His movements may be circumscribed by nothing more important than the stage furniture, but they must be guided accordingly. Unity of interpretation is as necessary as any other unity. In a modern play, for instance, all the actors must speak and move after the manners and customs of the day. It would be incongruous for one player to insist on reading his everyday speeches in the manner of the stilted theatrical method used in the earlier days—unless, of course, he is playing that kind of character. Sometimes an actor with a long experience in Shakespearean and other classic rôles

has a little difficulty in remembering that the lines in a modern comedy are not blank verse. It is faults such as these that the director is called upon to modify. No dramatist really wants an "all-star" cast for his play, because experience has taught him that unless the director is out of the ordinary, a genius of the craft, the play will be sacrificed to individual "hits"; while an expert director can handle the usual company of players, supposing none of them to be below the average, to the very best advantage.

Blue-penciling. The director has also a function of great interest to the dramatist—the altering and amending of the author's lines and business, the frequent blue-penciling of the writer's pet speeches. This matter is ofttimes not managed with any real discretion. But with an intelligent director, the changes are usually caused solely by the fact that the author's lines are inadequate to certain moments in the play, or certain business suggested is ineffective—facts which might only become apparent when the play is taking form on the stage and not noticed while it remained in manuscript.

It is only when the author himself is the stage-director that we find a play reaching the audience just as it left the writer's hands—and this is frequently because he himself makes changes in it at rehearsal. Sardou was so expert in his knowledge of the stage that even the shifting of furniture was planned for at the proper places in the dialogue. An author can work nearly an hour to find some plausible reason for changing the position of a

chair from one side of the stage to the other. It is hardly necessary to state that such explicit directions are best let alone by the novice. They are part of a competent stage-director's planning, and the author need only suggest.

A great stage-director must have three qualifications, and possess those three to an extraordinary degree. He must be able to absorb the author's ideas, until they become as much a part of himself as if he had personally evolved them; he must be able to pass those ideas into concrete action through the author's dialogue—though he may sometimes be compelled to substitute lines of his own to better express the author's idea than the latter has himself; and, most of all, he must be capable of conveying these ideas and actions to the players until all work toward the harmonious result he desires.

The actors and good parts. I advised in the previous chapter that you always keep in mind the fact that you are writing parts which actors will portray. All of the great playwrights, from the Greeks to the present day, wrote excellent rôles. It is because of this excellence that many a player looking for an opportunity to portray certain gifts goes as far back as Euripides to find a vehicle. This very good trait, however, has its pitfalls for the novice. Never fail to think of every speech you write as one that will be spoken aloud by an actor; but do not write speeches *solely* to give him something to say. The ability to write good parts is a mark of skill; you can acquire it with experience. But a good

acting part which is separate from the body of the play is not the fulfillment of this ability. It was in an effort to write a big scene for her heroine that a certain tyro "fell down" badly. An entirely unnecessary emotional scene was given this character, with no other apparent intention than that of giving the actress who might play the part something to do. The scene was out of place and undramatic, because it would have aroused wrong impressions in the mind of an audience, and given undue emphasis to a matter which the finale of the play plainly showed was of no importance. In this case, while remembering the actor, the writer had neglected the audience.

It is curious what an effect in the hands of an inexperienced writer this desire to create a good part will have on the writing of the play itself. I have seen several plays—I may add, only in manuscript—where really fine leading rôles eminently suited to certain well-known people were buried in bad plays. I cannot exactly state how such errors came about: possibly a poor story to begin with, and a continual "padding" of the leading part with good though unimportant acting scenes, until the part was out of all proportion to the play. Only an actor eaten up with conceit and blind to all the public demands would have looked at such a play.

Plays for particular actors. A dramatist is frequently called on to write plays for certain particular actors. What Shakespeare often did no ordinary writer need feel to be beneath him. That Gil-

bert and Sullivan wrote their operettas with certain actors and singers in mind has in no way impaired or dulled the beauty of their work. In truth, posterity is the gainer in the fact that even some of their minor rôles were intended to be sung by first-rate performers. The charm of the music of all parts given to the character-woman in most of these plays is owing to the fact that in the company which sang these operas when they had their original productions was a very clever comedienne with a really noteworthy contralto voice. The parts of "Katisha" in *The Mikado*, "Little Buttercup" in *Pinafore*, "Hannah" in *Ruddygore*, and the Fairy Queen in *Iolanthe*, will serve as examples of rôles written with this singer's capacities in mind.

Alfred Sutro, the English dramatist, author of *The Perplexed Husband*, said in an interview in the New York *Times:* "The knowledge that you are going to be interpreted by a great actor gives you courage and enthusiasm." Many dramatists mentally "cast" their plays after the characters are clearly in mind, and find it a help to visualize the parts as being acted by their chosen players.

The actor's opportunity. In this matter of writing good parts and being at the same time entirely natural something has been lost to the actor—big opportunity. In a magazine article some time ago, Walter Pritchard Eaton stated this loss and its reason very clearly: "In the stern elimination of any but truthful, logical, and significant situations, in the stern suppression of 'emotional' scenes for

their own sake, when such scenes do not arise naturally from the character and explain the intellectual message of the play, the modern dramatists have forged a technique which is capable of setting forth contemporary life on the stage as truthfully and plausibly as in a novel, of teaching by inference an ethical or political, or even philosophic lesson, of making the drama seem in the eyes of thinking men and women a more serious and important thing than it has been, in English, at least, for more than a century. And in doing this the dramatists have done well. But they have inevitably done it at a tremendous sacrifice . . . the sacrifice of great acting. . . . Progress will come, the restoration of great acting will come, when our modern dramatists discover greatness and poetry in contemporary life, when the representation of great emotions is demanded of actors not as a 'stunt' in an unimportant or false story, but as a logical outcome of an important and truthful story, as the natural expression of great men and women."

Before leaving the actor—only temporarily, for we are never going to forget him—let me again quote from the interview with Mr. Sutro: "Anything which would damage the actor's effectiveness or dull his ardor would be fatal to the drama. The ambition of the actor is the dramatist's greatest instrument for success. The author and the actor are of one blood; and the former is particularly dependent on the latter."

Mr. Eaton flings a challenge abroad to the drama-

tists, which all actors would echo, and which has a place here as an impetus to the runner who is fresh in the race: "What our stage needs is playwrights of greater and nobler imagination. What our actors need is a chance."

CHAPTER X

THE ACTOR, HIS DIRECTOR, AND HIS AUDIENCE (Continued)

THE EFFECT ON THE PUBLIC—THE PUBLIC'S SHARE IN THE PLAY—IGNORING THE AUDIENCE—WEDEKIND—CULTS—WRITING DOWN TO THE CROWD—LESS THAN THE BEST—THE POPULAR SIDE—HIGHLIGHTS—DISTRACTING SCENERY AND ACTIONS—INFORMING THE AUDIENCE

The effect on the public. What will be the effect of your play, as presented by the actor under direction, on your public? Will this effect be the one you intended to produce? We have spoken of it before in the matter of the creation of characters. On the very day this chapter was being written the following sentences occurred in the New York *Times* in the criticism of a play which in every other respect seems to have delighted the critic: "In the first act it must be admitted that the little wife did seem a dreadfully simple-minded person. One wanted to get up and shake her. But whether the fault was a too insistent softness in the acting or in the writing could not easily be determined at the moment."

It was once said by a well-known reviewer that the most important actor in the cast is the audience. The more the play is moving in his mind, the better

for your chances of success. If the spectators are puzzled, if your situations, to you pregnant with matter, seem to them to be meaningless, you have failed.

Ignoring the audience. Which brings us to a still undecided argument frequently waged by dramatists and reviewers—just how far may an audience be ignored? The argument seems to the present writer too purely academic to be of any real importance to living drama. Nevertheless, writers whose names demand respect and attention frequently make positive statements on one side or the other of the question. The truth might be—probably is—that here as elsewhere the middle ground is best, the extreme of either completely ignoring the public or of bowing servilely to it being equally bad. The drama, we are told, is a "function of the crowd." Therefore, the big writer is not the one who ignores or insults his public, but the one who first gets its attention and then takes it along with him whither he will. This has been the successful method from the beginning. Psychologists have a terse phrase which expresses quite simply the procedure in any course of instruction addressed to the human brain: "Proceed from the known to the unknown." From the teacher in the kindergarten to the orator in the great auditorium, the first rule is "Get their attention." This is accomplished almost invariably by telling them something they can quickly and easily understand. This once done, the length to which the audience can be carried is limited only by the holder of the

rostrum. If the audience refuses to follow, if the children become inattentive or bewildered, of what use is your message? You must get possession of your audience. This does not mean they must agree with you in every instance, but your premises must be so strong that they will at least respect your views.

Do not think I mean to advise giving the public only what you think it wants. That would take you to the opposite extreme of servility. In the first place, no one knows just what the public does want. And servility in that regard is frequently as productive of contempt as any other form of sycophancy.

Wedekind. On the other hand, to write only for one's self or a select coterie is to change from sycophancy to insolence. Wedekind might be a great dramatist, but he is not. No one of the finer writers with a real message to deliver has a greater contempt for his public. *The Awakening of Spring* is not a play, it is a thesis in dialogue form. It would have reached a larger public, preached a greater lesson, had the writer cared more for the people for whom his moral was drawn and sent it abroad in prose. There are reviewers who profess to admire his daring disregard of technique, forgetting that he is great, in spite of his use of the wrong medium, because of what he has to say. On the other hand, while Brieux's *Damaged Goods* is also a thesis in dialogue, it is so written that it can be played in a theater under ordinary conditions, without our realizing until it is over that it has transgressed

many of the laws of technique, especially so far as "story" is concerned. It might be well to add just here, as a cautionary note to the novice, that such subjects as are treated in these plays require expert handling not to offend against the canons of good taste. This is no place for an academic discussion as to their fitness for the theater: opinion is divided. But for the novice, with other difficulties facing him, such subjects are best left to the experienced dramatist.

The things which we call great, the things which will live, are the things on which the public, however belatedly, has set the seal of approval. This is not to say that all of the public is discerning; often an artistic success is not a popular one, and vice versa. But work which the public condemns cannot be great. The public may not understand the goodness or badness of the technical means you have used. But your subject and your point of view regarding that subject will be the points praised or condemned. It is not necessary to write for the lower element in the crowd to be human. To write for the average has been the aim of all the great writers. Disdain for the crowd is a pose, and not a mark of the great soul. How much finer it is to spur the ordinary man onward to a wider vision outside his own humdrum mental kingdom, than simply to ladle out mental pabulum to minds already surfeited!

Cults. In the theater we have a way of slangily dividing the audiences into "high-brows" and "low-

brows." Except where a play is of the "cult" order, there is no such thing as an audience exclusively one or the other. Both kinds, and all the intermediate varieties, make up the average audience. It is not individual. It is a crowd, its unit individualities partially submerged in the larger organism, its opinion that of the majority. There are, of course, exceptions, as in all crowds: the ones so strongly individual as to be above the crowd, and those so ordinary as to be below it in mental grasp. However, in an average theater of the first class the latter may be said to be an almost negligible quantity.

Writing down to the crowd. This fear of writing down to the crowd appears in all forms of writing. It is a fear of which I have spoken before. Write what you have to say. It is your message; if properly delivered, it will be sure to reach its mark. Arlo Bates speaks of this fear as being more especially a trait of the untrained writer, a feeling "that they lower themselves if they write for the intellectual bourgeoisie." To the writer who is sincere in his work, and above all in his art, his message, his theme, and the earnest desire to make both clear, are the things of paramount importance.

Less than the best. It is not often that I feel called upon to cross swords with William Archer, and it is perhaps unfair to rake up old opinions. But, in an address delivered at Columbia University, on one of his visits to America, he made this statement: "The art that, as a condition of its existence, is forced to make an instant appeal to such

an enormous public must in the very nature of things be mediocre art. The consequence is that no dramatist can afford to put the best that is in him into his plays." Believe me, if anyone puts less than his best into any play he writes, he pays the consequences. Oratory must make an instant appeal, and yet who will dare call the moving eloquence of a great orator mediocre art! Because an art is limited by the forms through which it expresses itself in no way affects the art. It is the ability to use these forms as if they were part of one's self and second nature that makes the artist. Get the attention and respect of your audience at the outset, and do not let their intellectual status worry you. If you have anything worth saying, you will find somebody to listen, sympathize, and understand. If your premises are sound, you will have listeners who will follow your arguments no matter how iconoclastic. If you insult or defy them, they will neither listen nor heed.

There is a mercenary side, of course—the popular side. A well-known dramatist has half contemptuously expressed himself on the subject—you may draw your own conclusions and regard or disregard as you choose: "A successful dramatist should have no other theories of life than that he should discover the mass of the people's theories of life. . . . The public objects to have its mode of thought shaken, and the dramatist, if he wants to be successful, at least, must go with the crowd."

. . . . . .

High-lights. In a painting, there is always some focal point, the high-light, the place to which the artist wishes to draw your first look. This focal point exists in the play as well as in the painting—it occurs with every new scene. We speak frequently of something as being "completely in the picture," or as being "out of the picture," meaning in the latter case something which has distracted the attention, or spoiled a harmony. In these days we are so used to realism on the stage that it is not always some point in the scenery which catches the attention at the wrong moment: in the first days of realistic scenic construction the fault very often lay in this direction. It does still occur, however, and never fails to distract attention from some important line or business. If this unusual scenic touch is part of the effect to be produced, then it is "in the picture." Often we find the curtain rising on a scene of peculiar loveliness, and an instant or two is allowed before anyone enters or speaks so that the effect may be allowed to sink in. But too much realism is sure to call attention away from some important point. In a clever play produced in New York some ten years or more ago was a certain scene where a window was partially opened for some reason, and again closed. At the moment of the lifting of the window, a pair of muslin curtains instantly blew inward as if tossed by a wintry breeze. It was natural, realistic, rather pretty in effect, and of course everyone saw it with pleased surprise. But —I doubt if anyone in the audience noticed what

the actors were doing or saying at the moment. We already knew it was a cold day; every character entering from outdoors had spoken of it, all were dressed for icy weather, so the effect was unnecessary and distracting. A window-curtain does not always blow when the window is opened, even in winter.

The same is true of distracting action as of distracting scenery. Very frequently such action is the fault of the stage-director, sometimes of an inconsiderate or ignorant player. But sometimes it is the dramatist who draws attention away from his "high-light" by a sudden speech from some character other than those concerned. Occasionally this distraction may be necessary—it may break the tension which was growing too taut. But it must be handled skillfully. A situation or line which causes an audience to laugh at the wrong moment makes it difficult to get them back to the proper spirit again —for a few moments, anyway. Two experiences of actors in two plays will show how carefully such scenes must be handled by dramatist, director, and actor.

Some years ago, in Boston, a well-known actress was rehearsing in a play never before produced in this country. The director was able, experienced; the instructions of the dramatist were being carefully followed. Delighted with a certain climax at the very end of the play, he turned genially to a young actor sitting near him: "Great, isn't she!" The youngster nodded decidedly, then, half timidly,

for he was very new in the business, added: "But, Mr. ——, aren't you afraid—er—I mean, won't they laugh?" "Laugh! No! They'll be looking at *her!*" The opening night the young actor was too much worried about his own part to take much notice. But next day, the great director, passing him on the stage, stopped and half grudgingly, yet generously, said: "Young 'un, you were right. They *laughed!*" The enthusiastic director had seen only the star in the center of the stage; the young man's eyes had wandered to another part of the stage to a scene going on at the same moment which was distinctly comedy. Needless to say, the scene was changed.

In the other case, two well-known actors had a scene together. One was the star, the other his leading man. They were friends, as well. The star had several opportunities to show his abilities; this scene was the leading man's one chance. It was highly emotional and played rapidly. About the middle of the scene, the star, whose part was light comedy, had to interrupt. If he read his interruption for comedy effect, he received an outburst of laughter. That laugh killed the rest of the scene, and all the skill of the other man could hardly get the audience back to the proper point of view which the really big speeches to follow demanded. So the star very generously sacrificed this one misplaced laugh, read the speech almost in the same key as the other actor, and the scene was saved. The fault here lay with the dramatist, since he in-

tended his hero to be as witty as possible, at both opportune and inopportune moments.

Always keep in mind the impression you want to produce. It is so very easy to give a wrong one. Sometimes one does not realize the fact until the play has gone into rehearsal. So often one's hero will be strong, vital, impressive in one's own mind, and the lines given him will present weakness in every form to the audience. We will say more of this false or wrong impression later. It is mentioned here because it concerns the audience.

Informing the audience. Another matter under frequent discussion is the imparting of a secret to the audience. Some writers maintain that an audience must never be kept in the dark; others, that it is good to do so, if you can. But the rub is, you cannot. Very few people go to the theater in these days of daily newspapers knowing nothing of the story of a play. Therefore, the most carefully, most adroitly concealed secret is no secret at all. An audience practically says to the characters: "We know all about the mess you've got yourselves into. Now let's see how cleverly you'll get out." If you are clever enough to manage a real surprise, go ahead. I fear it could only be done to perfection by springing a fresh one at every performance. If an audience confidently expects certain things to happen, it will go hard with you if your surprise is inadequate or disappointing. Says A. B. Walkley: "The aim of the great artist is not to surprise the spectator with an unforeseen, but to gratify him with

an 'inevitable' action. It is not to provoke his curiosity about what is going to happen so much as to excite in him a keen desire that a certain thing shall happen, and then satisfy that desire to the full." This in no way precludes surprising and adroitly managed developments. But do not expect them to remain secrets, from the very nature of the present-day theater. However, there are surprises in the delineation of a character which may not, through their entirely psychological nature, become public knowledge, as would a surprise which concerned mere episode. But it is doubtful if the keeping from an audience such an important matter as the mental habits of a character is either wise or dramatic. Doing so spoiled most of the effect of Bernstein's *The Secret*. That his heroine was suffering from a sort of moral warp amounting to monomania was a point that reached the audience too late to arouse its sympathy. Ibsen made no such mistake with *Hedda Gabler*.

If you excite a desire that a certain thing shall happen, if you fail to satisfy that desire in order to "spring" some secret or sudden surprise, and if in spite of this your play succeeds, you have done something very remarkable. It has been said before that there is no hard and fast rule of play-writing. Do as you please, if you can "get it over." But if you are just beginning to write plays, follow what rules there are. It will be wiser in the long run, believe me.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCENARIO

A CHART—THE CHARACTERS—PLASTICITY OF THE SCENARIO—THE OLD FORMALISM—NUMBER OF ACTS—PERIODS OF DEVELOPMENT—SCENE DESCRIPTIONS—ACT ONE—LETTING THE MACHINERY CREAK—THE INTENDED CONCLUSION—EXAMPLES OF DEVELOPMENT—EXPLANATION TOO LATE—EXPLANATION TOO EARLY

Let us see how far you have gone along the road to writing your play. You know something of the internal mechanism of the theater, you have given due consideration to the actor's part in play-production, you have an average idea of the audience's place. All these are very necessary.

The chart. Of your play itself you have only your story, containing within it the effect you wish that story to produce. Taking all these things into consideration, you are still of the mind that your story is fit for dramatic presentation. If you have taken the suggestion of writing it first as prose, you will be better able to alter and rearrange it than if it is merely a chaotic jumble in your head. This suggestion to write out a bit of prose fiction is intended solely as an assistant for the novice, for reasons I have already carefully explained. On the

clearness of this story will depend the practicability of your scenario. It takes much experience to turn out a clear-cut scenario at the first writing, and even the best are altered again and again as the characters take form and life. This first scenario is only a chart for your own use. The later scenario, which is a résumé to be submitted to a manager—should he ever demand one, which he rarely does—is written from the completed play.

The characters. With your story written as suggested you have found certain characters necessary to aid in the telling. These must have definite place in your mind, definite reasons for existence, before becoming part of your scenario. In the chapter on the characters you found certain notes of warning in regard to these. But the more they are human beings to you, the easier you will find the matter of putting your story into shape. Do not be alarmed at the information that the work you are now on is perhaps the most important part of your playwriting. You plan your work with as much detail as you find possible at the time. You find the point at which you desire events to begin, determine on the manner in which you will work them out, and upon the conclusion or climax.

Plasticity of the scenario. However, remember this: your plan, your scenario, is plastic. It is a guide; if while at work writing the actual play you find a better way of " getting there " than your guide suggests, do not hesitate to take it. Any form which gives you a feeling of rigidity, of compulsion, is

only of use as practice in the work of filling in. I am sure the resulting play would be stiff and formal. Eugène Scribe went so far as to say: "When my scenario is very clear, very complete, I might have the play written by my servant." One wonders what kind of a servant he had. We know that his plays were of the old-school, French formalism—the so-called "well-made play." But as to a hide-bound scenario, filled in by an underling—it is a risk few would care to take.

So "fluid"—as William Archer expresses it—is your scenario that it is possible not only to shift scenes and characters, even to the point of complete elimination or substitution, but the very nature and quality of the idea you are working out may be changed. What may have impressed you as a farcical idea when you started grows into something so serious as to be almost tragic. This shows the importance of sifting and re-sifting all your material again and again. The more thoroughly this is done before starting your play, the less alteration afterward you will be compelled to make. But this, as elsewhere throughout your apprenticeship, is where only practice and experience can be your guide.

The old formalism. The old formalism demanded an introduction, the rise, the climax, the return or fall, and the catastrophe; the play was usually divided into five acts. To-day the majority have but three, corresponding to the major and minor premises and conclusion of the usual argument or syllogism—though this correspondence is usually unconscious,

since most well-built arguments in any line fall into this division. It is, therefore, not a rigid but an entirely natural form. Nevertheless, successful modern plays have been written with four acts which, though less symmetrical, may yet be made necessary by some form of argument used to produce the desired conclusion. With the old five-act formula much extraneous matter crept in, in the nature of subplots, comedy relief, and like methods no longer popular. In Sheldon's recent dramatization of Sudermann's *The Song of Songs* there are five acts; and almost without exception critics agreed that it would have been a stronger play if the first two had been omitted.

Going back still further than the old formal plays, we find that there were actually parts in these unnecessarily drawn-out plays which were not meant to be especially heeded. We are told by Charles Hastings in his book, *The Theatre:* "As there were no entr'actes, the spectators (in the Greek theater) had to bring their provisions, which they ate during the less interesting parts of the play; but as soon as the great actors came on the scene the viands were put aside out of respect for them." It is no longer necessary to provide dull periods in the course of a play to enable the spectators to gossip or dine; the entr'actes do that, therefore the drama proper allows of no extraneous material.

Number of acts. With your story in hand, and the characters you mean to use, plan the number of acts you think you will require, and how much

of the story you wish to cover in each act. Your acts will usually run from thirty to forty-five minutes. See that your action is possible within that period. By possible, I would seem to mean that the action should cover just the number of minutes required to play the act—using the word *action* in its drama sense as meaning the episodes, et cetera, in the act. But the action possible in an act can be quite elastic. When people are interested, the time passes quickly; if it is clevérly done, the action may appear to cover more than an hour, or even two, during the passage of the regulation playing-time in an act. In *Arsène Lupin*, a successful play recently seen in New York, the first act was supposed to include the hours from five to nine P.M. This is an extreme case, but it was so adroitly managed that one did not think of it until afterward. It was nevertheless a mistake. I read a play a little while ago in which, at the beginning of the act, the heroine received a letter. By the end of the same act she spoke of the receipt of that letter as being two years previous. Two years! And not a sign of a curtain to mark the passage of time!

If you want a little practice in preparing a scenario before starting your own, take a copy of some successful modern play, and write a scenario from it. A synopsis is simply a story in your own words of the main facts of the play. A scenario takes the drama scene by scene, entrances, exits, et cetera. Turn to Appendix A, which will show you what is meant. Exclusive of my explanatory notes, this

analysis is very much the sort of thing a dramatist works up for his scenario. In Appendix B you will find a brief working scenario for Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. This is not so exhaústive as the more analytical scenario in Appendix A. Make one for yourself from any other play you wish. Scenery descriptions are omitted from both of these. In an original scenario they would be more or less necessary. Study A and B in connection with these two chapters.

A start for a very conventional three-act comedy, minus, in this case, any especial interest or drama, might run thus:

Act One—The meeting.

Act Two—The quarrel.

Act Three—The reconciliation.

Periods of development. You have thus divided your action into three periods of development or progress. In Act One you intend to bring your hero and heroine together, with all the attendant incidents. In Act Two you mean to have them quarrel, giving the reasons and episodes leading thereto. In Act Three you wish to reunite them. On this skeleton you hang your scenario. You fill in, following the plan of the model story you have already written out as an assistant. Give entrances and exits, and snatches of dialogue or apt phrases as they occur to you.

Scene descriptions. We will begin with Act One. Your scenario gives place, time, and something of your general idea for the setting or scenery of the act.

If your knowledge of stage mechanics is slight, you need not be too detailed; if your use of terms is incorrect, you will only be confusing. Better say, merely, a library, a garden, et cetera, than display undue ignorance, which will immediately prejudice the play-reader.

I want to say right here that this ignorance at the very beginning of a play is one of the most frequent reasons why the unknown playwright does not have his plays read: I am speaking now of the finished MS., not the scenario. The very natural managerial supposition is that if the writer knows so little of his medium, he must know less of his method. If you have a good story to tell, a mere ignorance of technical terms does not prevent your writing it. On the other hand, it is not necessary to exhibit that ignorance by use of the wrong terms.

The first paragraph or so of a finished scenario is descriptive business. For your own personal use, it will only be necessary to generalize in this description, to hold the mental picture in mind. By "business" we generally mean all of a play that is not actually spoken by the players. It includes descriptions, actions, gestures, and so on; frequently, however, only actions and gestures are meant.

The "business" in a Shaw play is usually as good reading as the play itself, but Shaw is unique. Do not attempt to imitate that part of his work. Imitation of any other part would be either impossible or inadvisable. Your chief concern is to be as clear and concise as you can.

If there are people on the stage at rise of the curtain, mention them in order, with a brief description of each, something of the general appearance, and chief characteristics, to prove to yourself that they are clear in your mind. Sometimes the curtain rises on an "empty stage." By that we simply mean, not that the stage is unfurnished, but that none of the characters is present.

The following is a suggestion based on personal experience. Have a pad, eight by five, or tear large sheets of paper in half to about this size. Begin each scene on a separate sheet. That is, if you will refer to the appendix, all that goes in scene one as written there would go on the first sheet, using both sides, if necessary. Then, if in the process of writing it becomes necessary to refer back, either to transfer from one scene to another, or to "plant" a situation which may come to you later as necessary, you have only to turn to the proper sheet of paper and write it in—almost anywhere on the sheet will do, so long as it gets on that page, for future reference. I suggest sheets of this size instead of the card catalogue system so often used in other branches of writing, because the cards in many cases would be too small to contain the amount of material. However, if you prefer the cards, use them. Some such method as this will clarify your idea amazingly.

Act One. To go back to our first act. All you wish to have happen which leads up to the meeting of your lovers must find place in this act. Also you must lay the ground in various ways for events to

occur in Acts Two and Three. All that happens later should in some way be prepared for in this first act—a speech here, a bit of business there, all tending to later cumulative events. Since you mean to have the lovers quarrel in Act Two, the reasons leading to this quarrel must be given in Act One—perhaps something in the personality of one of the lovers or some other character, or in the manner of their meeting, or what you will. We need not see too plainly that a quarrel is inevitable, but you must prepare for its possibility. Even the Third Act reconciliation need not just "happen," to make a happy ending. Nor, unless there is some especial motive of which you mean to make dramatic use, is it necessary to make all these reasons and plans too obvious. No matter what apparently unexpected events may occur in your play, they must be coordinate parts of your plot; but in some way the mind of the spectator must be prepared for them.

The intended conclusion, with examples. All through Act One you, as creator, must always keep in mind your intended conclusion. For instance, in a play of which I spoke in an earlier chapter, the husband died in Act One, to make room for another man to whom the heroine gave her troth at the finale of the play. That betrothal was the author's conclusion. Yet in Act One her heroine's grief over her husband's death was so excessive, so emotional, that no matter how much one realized the forgetfulness of human nature, her love for the other man came as a shock. What if the author

did make years pass between? The reader and spectator had to bridge the gap mentally in a few minutes. If it was necessary to remove the husband, then his widow's love and marriage to another man should have been in some way prepared either by making husband number one a brute or showing us that his wife really did not love him, so that regret at his death would be tempered by relief at her release. Or the husband could have died before the play began. Matters antedating the beginning of the play do not affect an audience so strongly. This is a crude example from a very crude play, but I think it serves the purpose.

Explanation too late. If it is bad to put into your first act a needless situation of this kind, it is almost as mistaken to put into the second or later acts matters which should find place in the first. If one is reading a book, one has time to stop and think and wonder why certain people are brought forward. In a play the spectator does not pause for this sort of guesswork. He is following the story just as it is presented by the actors. I think I can better explain my meaning by another example. In a play read recently, it was the writer's intention to show us at the end of the play that a certain character was the daughter of the villain. Neither was aware of the relationship. It was one of those cases where some inkling of the secret should have been imparted to the audience. At least their interest in the girl should have been aroused in some way. But in this instance she was a very minor character, and almost

to the very moment of the disclosure had moved through the piece merely as an accessory; the surprise, when it came, would have meant little or nothing, as the spectators would have hardly been aware the girl was in the cast. The dénouement should have been prepared in Act One.

Another example of another kind of development. It was the case of an irritating heroine. The author knew there were reasons for her peculiarities and at the end of the play put the explanation into the mouth of one of his characters. It was too late. An audience would have been watching her for some time, and would have formed its own opinion: the fair lady was an ill-mannered little cat. Since he wished sympathy for his heroine, here was an example of an author's effect going astray because of a tardy explanation which came too late to reconcile an audience to her personality. What this amateur did ignorantly, Bernstein probably did deliberately in *The Secret*. Needless to say, his skill partially glossed over the fault; the novice's blunder ruined his play.

Explanation too early. If one can be too late, one can also be a little "too previous." Do not put an important situation too early in the play. The reason is not so much literary as a matter of feasibility. Usually for the first five or ten minutes after the rise of the curtain the audience is coming in, in twos and threes, with necessary commotion which distracts the attention. In *The Man from Home*, a play having a long New York run recently,

an error of this kind was made. Within three minutes of the opening two important characters had a conversation in which was explained a circumstance which gave the audience a clue to all that transpired later. I know several people who saw the play, who never heard certain vital words and explanations in that bit of dialogue. In one instance, a totally different impression was received than the author intended. Your play must begin at once, but it need not begin by leaps and bounds. Had that conversation been delayed, say five minutes, it would have made certain matters much clearer. The play, however, was a big success because of a certain inescapable charm which even this error could not mar.

The opening scene. Repetition has practically killed a one-time popular method of opening the play. Seven out of ten of the old-fashioned plays used to begin with a scene between a butler or a footman, and a pert chambermaid. In fact, in the days of the traveling star and the resident stock company, so frequent were such parts as the latter that a "singing chambermaid"—possibly equivalent to the soubrette of later days—was a member of the forces. The scene was usually a comedy love-scene. Daily, one picks up plays by novices with this stereotyped opening. It is so stereotyped in these days as to be hopelessly banal. The servant problem is so unpleasant a home question that these impossible comedians are a needless aggravation, because untrue to life. This does not mean that an

amusing, sometimes important scene is not often written around the serving band of a household. But if you ring your curtain up on a cheap and *unnecessary* love-scene between two of them, it must be done with great skill to avoid the accusation of staleness.

CHAPTER XII

MORE ABOUT THE SCENARIO

THE EXPOSITION—INTRODUCTION OF THE CHARACTERS—LOOSE ENDS—ENTR'ACTES—SCENES—CLIMAX—ACT CLIMAXES—BLIND-ALLEYS—THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN SIDE OF THE STORY—RIGHT SELECTION — RETARDED ACTION — THE ENDING — WORK ON THE SCENARIO

The exposition. To present the story of a play properly, it is necessary that the audience should learn all about that portion of the plot which has taken place before the play itself begins. There are certain matters in the past needful to our comprehension of the present. These matters must be presented to the audience without the impression being given that the author is talking or giving information. In the strictly formal drama all this information was massed in the first act; Scribe put much of it in the earliest scenes. To-day this exposition is scattered as needed throughout the drama. Even with this license, however, most of it falls naturally into the first act, by which fact we may assume this to be its proper place. If a better effect is obtained by delaying any piece of information until later, the place where it is most valuable is the place where it belongs. But to a great degree the first

act shows us just who the characters are and in what relation they stand to each other. This is correct, since the spectators want to know. Skill makes it possible to tell all of this by seemingly spontaneous and natural dialogue and action. The dramatist "seems to take the spectators *in medias res* while he is building the foundation of his plot." Note how this is done in the two appended scenarios.

Introduction of the characters. Bring on your several characters as nearly as possible in their proper places. When you begin to write the play itself, you may change this all about. You must feel free to do so. I want to again remind you that this first scenario is never arbitrary. It contains your working idea, and however incomplete it may be, it is almost impossible to work without it. It is especially helpful in separating and keeping distinct your characters. Whether originally they caused, or were the result of, your story, they are now your means of telling it.

For instance, let us take the suggested skeleton-plot. Since in Act Three your lovers are to be reconciled, you must be sure that your audience wants that reconciliation. In other words, your lovers must appear to be two people who to the average mind belong together. From the beginning, the audience must be glad to have them meet, sorry to have them separate, rejoice to see them happy again. It seems simple, does it not? Of course, if the quarrel contains the argument of your play—for instance, that

lovers should not quarrel over trifles—you may handle it so that the unnecessary quarrel contains a salutary lesson. But bear in mind your conclusion: they are to be reconciled. Therefore, no matter how violent the quarrel, the audience must want to see them reunited. The reason for this desire may be that the reconciliation may mean justice to someone wronged; it need not necessarily be the feeling that both deserve happiness. But for whatever reason, if your audience does not care whether Mary and John "make-up," something is wrong. Take as an example a quarrel worked out in this manner: a third character is Tom, who also loves Mary. You intend the curtain to fall on Mary and John together, with Tom out of it all. Suppose in writing your play, you make John from the very beginning so aggressive and didactic in his manner to Mary that you arouse the indignation of the spectators, who are really glad when Mary turns from him. If in addition you have made Tom attractive, how are you going to satisfy the audience with your predetermined finale? If your argument happens to be that men should have better manners, then your play can contain a lesson on politeness. But there is Tom. We do not want to have to be sorry for Tom, so something must be planned to keep us from spoiling our pleasure in John's good luck by thoughts of Tom's disappointment. Do you see what I mean by always keeping the conclusion in mind from the very start? The example is not even an interesting story, but it will serve the point.

Loose ends. Sometimes, even in a strong play, many loose ends have been left showing, many questions left unanswered. It is a fault, however successful the play may be, causing it to fall into the category of plays which succeed in spite of faults. If at a certain point in your story you feel strongly that a criticism is possible or probable, it is a good maxim to "say it first." Anticipate wherever you can any questions as to why your characters did the things you have made them do. I do not think I can make the matter any clearer just here; if it is not plain now, it will be when you are revising your first transcript.

Entr'actes. Bernard Shaw in *Getting Married* has made an attempt at writing a long play without any division into acts. There are two reasons why this is not a desirable move. In many cases, if the leading players have had strenuous or difficult scenes, the entr'acte gives a breathing space, a period of rest. Since the actors frequently have moments during an act when they are not on the stage, and can therefore rest, the other reason is perhaps more important. To compel an audience to sit for two hours without intermission is putting something of a strain on nerves and endurance. For the present, at least, the division into acts is an excellent arrangement not to be lightly upset. Remember I am referring to long plays intended to furnish an evening's entertainment of two hours or more. A play of such length without act-divisions would be more than likely to be either boring or fatiguing to any audience.

However, Mr. Shaw's play was produced with a division into acts.

I have spoken frequently of "scenes" in a scenario. A scene is any situation or grouping in a play —the bricks of which your drama is constructed. The arrangement and sequence of these are no more arbitrary than the scenario itself. In your scenario there may be marked divisions between scenes. This is more apparent than real. In the French dramas, these divisions are set down in the manuscript, with the result that we have an act containing a dozen or so numbered scenes. In English and American dramas, a scene numbered in the MS. means the fall of the curtain.

The scenario division into scenes is for your own guidance—a part of the machinery. When welded together in the writing of your play, these scenes must dovetail by natural transitions, and all sense of marked division between them must be eliminated. I speak of this at such length because the habit of numbering scenes in a play manuscript has strange results for the novice. An original transcript of a first play was separated in this way by the writer and the ending of one scene and commencement of the next were in many instances so abrupt as to give an impression of a complete shift of interest. The succeeding scene would not begin exactly where its predecessor left off. The moment all these scene-numbers were excised, the author saw his error very clearly and the necessary transitions were written in.

I wrote a little way back of the three-act play being a little more symmetrical than any other division. Do not carry this desire for symmetry into the length of your acts. I have known novices to try to have each act of equal length, with the result that "padding" was plainly evident to fill out the necessary number of pages. If it happens to come out that way, all right; but to do it purposely is the sheerest folly. Only a novice would make the attempt.

Sometimes it is necessary to divide an act into scenes by dropping the curtain, to show the passage of time—scene two supposedly taking place several minutes or hours later than scene one, and in the same place; or a change of scenery may be necessary in this scene-division. The latter is allowable, but no longer frequent, except in some of the big melodramas, especially in the Drury Lane importations like *The Whip* and others. Do not be afraid to use it if your play cannot exist without it. Otherwise, avoid it. If the division should require a change of scenery, it is not advisable in a first play, as every shift of scenery entails extra expense on the producer.

This matter of a regard for the expense of a production is at present a necessary aspect of the theater; it has its disadvantageous side. Many a play of really dramatic worth has missed production because it would cost too much. There are certain managers willing to take this risk, because of the opportunity to display the artistic skill required.

But rarely are these heavy and expensive productions the work of an unknown writer. The cost and not the worth of the play has been the reason for its non-production. In fact, after a glance at the manuscript, finding himself not only faced by an unknown name but many scenes as well, it is doubtful if the play would even be read.

Climax. The climax of your play is the climax of your story. It does not always follow as a law, but as a general thing in most well-constructed plays this climax seems to come either toward the end of next-to-the-last act or early in the last act. The remainder of the play is the solution or "untying of the knot." In the suggested plot the climax would be the quarrel and separation. Each act has its climax also, and on this climax it is best to drop the curtain. A manager may say to a writer: "All your curtains are good," or, "That second-act curtain is bad." He of course refers not to the actual curtain, but to the scene on which it falls.

Do you remember the serial stories in your childish magazines? The "to be continued in our next" always came at some point that left you eager and even impatient for the next number. Your curtain climaxes should as nearly as possible partake of that "to be continued" aspect. They must not be abrupt or "cut-off," but logical, with a thread left loose to be carried into the next act.

"Bought and Paid For." *Bought and Paid For* will serve as an example. At the close of Act Three, the husband and wife have a violent quarrel,

at the end of which she leaves the house, declaring she will never return until he makes a certain promise. They love each other, but both are very proud, and the man resents her demand of a promise. Many dramatists would have brought down the curtain on this climax—the angry, hurt wife gone, the equally hurt but proud husband left alone. But this climax would have held the thought that the husband did not really love his wife, and though we might feel that a reconciliation was inevitable in Act Four, still our feeling would not be kindly toward the husband who had certainly up to that point been in the wrong. So Mr. Broadhurst untied a little thread, a connecting link to carry a tender thought of both mistaken young people over to the final act. As the door closes on the wife, the husband is left standing for an instant. Then he hurries to a telephone and quickly calls a detective bureau. The few words spoken assure us that, though the wife has left his home, he means still to watch and protect her; the detective is to be at hand to shield her from any annoyance which may come on her return to earning her own living.

Blind-alleys. In telling your story, do not open up "blind-alleys." This can be done in numberless ways besides the very obvious one of wandering in the story. Occasionally these blind-alley openings are bits of business. Two examples will explain. In an unproduced play the writer had indicated a telephone, which was answered within a booth out of hearing of the audience. In his manuscript this

meant nothing; it was merely a bit of office atmosphere. There are places in any play where such "atmosphere" would be entirely legitimate. In this case it was an actual blind-alley. The stage was empty save for one important character. It was in the middle of the play, and in the midst of important affairs; a sudden bell in such a place should suggest drama, "something doing." Anyone hearing would say, "Ah! What's going to happen now?" and would wait expectantly to learn. In this case nothing happened: it was only the ubiquitous telephone with an unknown person at the other end. False hopes raised in the spectators, and a blind-alley clue.

The other example is from *Kindling*, a successful, really big play. I saw it three times and each time this point had the same effect on me. Heinie, the hero, is talking to one of the other characters. His wife is seated a trifle apart, tired, her arm resting on the sill of a partly-open window. The wife is in the picture, really the center of interest, so there is no need of calling our attention to her. Suddenly, while talking, Heinie interrupts himself to say to his wife: "Don't sit there at that window; you'll catch cold. Better close it." Then he returns to his conversation, while Maggie shuts the window. It happens that the episode is entirely unimportant, so that whenever I saw it I had not recalled it, which accounts for the fact that each time the hero uttered these words I received the same impression that our attention was being drawn

to this window for some dramatic purpose, later to be explained. Each time I was disappointed.

Finally, on reading the play, I discovered the reason. It was to give the wife an excuse for closing the window and drawing the shade, so that later a detective could be discovered hiding outside. From the audience's standpoint, this detective is only of interest because he blocks one egress. The principal detective enters through the *door*, where the dramatic attention is consequently centered. We already knew the window could be used, for Steve has made his escape that way. Therefore, the speech was unnecessary, and because of its effect, an actual, though unconscious, blind-alley. Reading it, with the playwright's business directions in front of us to explain, we do not feel so strongly the interruption. Seen, in the theater, the speech divides attention in a way to arouse expectations of something dramatic at the window without fulfilling them. Incidentally, the preceding, in a marked degree, points the difference between the eyes and mental attitude of the reader and those of the spectator.

The seen and the unseen side. Be sure when turning your story into a scenario that you have selected for stage presentation the most vital and dramatic aspects of the subject. This is true whether you are dealing with tragedy or comedy. You may have a truly thrilling story and by using the wrong situations to express it utterly fail to make it dramatic. This power of right selection is a quality of the dramatic instinct. It is frequently a matter of

emphasis; it may rest on the wrong character, as set forth in the example given in the chapter on characters, or it may lie with the presentation of a situation. I am often impressed with the two aspects of a play, which I may call the seen and unseen sides. The unseen would be all those matters which reach the spectator as information of past or present events, but not actually taking place on the stage; the seen would, of course, be those situations and characters presented to the eye. Plays so often reach the critic in which the complete story is in the manuscript, but the parts which should be action are given as information, and vice versa; situations which would be dramatic, properly presented, occur off-stage and are merely described. Sometimes a play should begin where the writer's manuscript ends. I saw a striking example of this in a one-act play which had an interesting and dramatic story as its base. The writer had spread his exposition all over the play to the curtain, when as a matter of fact the *result* of this exposition was the real drama of his plot. There are some things which expediency demands shall take place off-stage and between the acts. I have no reference to such situations. I am dealing only with the mistaken choice between the seen and unseen aspects. It is one of those things you will learn to judge and balance best by writing and keeping at it. In *Kindling*, as an example, Maggie's share in Steve's burglary is a most important part of the plot. Some dramatists might have considered it one of the episodes to be

"seen" by the audience. Mr. Kenyon was wiser. To see the heroine steal is one thing, but it is more important dramatically to know *why* she stole, and the result of the act. Therefore, the reason, and the result, have been made the "seen" side of the play, while the stealing is the "unseen" side, occurring between acts.

Also, among the situations which belong on the "seen" or action side of the play is the one which the great French critic, Sarcey, called the *scène à faire*—that is, the situation which is so vital to the plot that the audience has a right to expect to see it really presented, and not slurred over and merely talked about. I like Victor Hugo's very human way of putting it: "Grave personages, placed like a Greek chorus between us and the drama, come to tell us what is taking place in the temple, in the palace, in the public place, until we are tempted to call out to them: 'Truly? Then, why do you not take us there? It must be amusing, it must be well worth seeing!'"

Retarded action. I wish to say just a few words at this point regarding a misconception, or rather misinterpretation of an expression which playwrights fully understand but which, because of this misunderstanding on the part of the novice, causes trouble to him in a first play when he tries to apply it. Two standard books on play-construction speak, the one, of "retardation of action," the other, of "suspended tension." Now, this retardation or suspension takes on the nature of "the sword of Damocles," as Archer expresses it. But in an ama-

teurish effort to " retard " or " suspend " action, the novice all too frequently completely sidetracks it. This sidetracking thus becomes mere " padding." You will see references to this again. But in planning your scenario, see to it that in holding back information or crises until more dramatic moments you do not become so entirely irrelevant as to completely stop the action. There must always be an undercurrent. We often speak of points in a play where the action drops. These are usually points at which some maladroit writer endeavored to retard, and, instead, came to a dead stop. Turn again to the scenarios A and B, and note how action is dramatically suspended or delayed.

The ending. And now for your play's conclusion. I have said you must keep this ending always in mind. It is a maxim of good writing in any field. Brander Matthews makes this statement: " The play itself is what counts, not the way it is made to end." Very few writers or dramatists agree with this statement. It is his working out, his solution of the problem, which makes his play worth while. Everything which led up to it is here capped with the writer's best reason for writing his play—the way out of the difficulties he has himself brought to pass. In the " slice of life " drama we see what might be called a temporary ending. It may be unhappy, but just as unhappy moments in life are followed by brighter ones, so this " temporary " ending is not the actual catastrophe. It usually, however, foreshadows the true ending. When enough has been

shown for the spectator to draw his own conclusions and deduce his moral, the curtain descends. It is not an easy type of play for the novice to attempt. And the usual audience is better satisfied with some sort of real finale, all the loose ends tied up, the questions answered. It is no longer the custom, however, to have all the happy couples strung around the stage in loving groups for the final curtain. In the beautiful curtain to *Shore Acres* the curtain falls on an empty stage. In *The Man from Home* we do not even see the lovers together. Pike is standing alone, when through the open windows of the hotel come the strains of "Sweet Genevieve." He lifts his face suddenly, then moves swiftly to the door of the hotel parlor, and disappears as the curtain falls. We know who is at the piano, and the thought of that meeting is almost better than seeing it. In *Cousin Kate*, Brian holds out his arm to Kate, smilingly offering his escort to dinner. As she takes it, with "Sure, and I will," in a tender imitation of his brogue, only the happy voices and the fact that both her hands rest on his arm show the undercurrent. There is an effort to make the ending not only inevitable, but natural, and either mentally or emotionally satisfying.

You have been advised to bear the ending always in mind, and yet not to "let the machinery creak." Here again practice and your instinct will help. If the ending is too plainly seen from too mechanical handling of the plot, the audience becomes merely the spectator who is rather bored because he knows

just what is going to happen. Of course, you may say that people see a favorite play more than once. So they do. And they read a favorite book more frequently than that. But it is always because the first reading was so pleasantly full of well-managed surprises and cumulative interest. We never read the too obvious book or see the too obvious play the second time unless there is some personal reason, like re-reading some pleasing passage, or watching some favorite actor.

Work on the scenario. Now, before starting in on your dialogue, live with your scenario for a while. Let the story become real to you. Then forget it, if you can, in something else. When you go back to it again, you will bring a fresh point of view. I have known people to work, and plan, and revise a scenario for a year and more before one word of actual dialogue has been set down. Sometimes an important scene may be sketched in, but no more. The scenario is the body—skeleton, blood, and sinew—of your play. The dialogue is only the dress.

Before beginning this part of the work, go over the scenario carefully. See that your situations are not so arranged that you have simply a series of dialogues; or since we call all that is spoken in a play the dialogue, we will call a scene between two people a *duologue*. A series of duologue scenes would be as follows: Two people are talking; one exits, another enters. The two on the stage talk, then the first exits and another enters. Again two are left talking. Unless the conversation is actively dramatic,

and the exits and entrances rapid, as in a war-play, where the several duologues may be between officers or conspirators, such an arrangement is apt to grow tiresome through its lack of variety. It frequently happens in a novice's play, because of a fault spoken of earlier—the too sharp division between scenes. But, since we are ready for dialogue and duologues, we will discuss them in their proper place.

CHAPTER XIII

WRITING THE PLAY: THE DIALOGUE AND ACTION

DUOLOGUES—BROKEN SENTENCES—GETTING INFORMATION TO THE AUDIENCE—PLATONIC AND SOCRATIC DIALOGUE—DISCUSSIONS AND ARGUMENTS—NARRATIVES—LOCAL COLOR—DIALECT—TECHNICAL PHRASEOLOGY

In the last chapter we considered the planning of the scenario in such a way as not to have the opening scenes a *series* of duologues, and also learned why: which brings us by a natural transition to the actual writing of these scenes.

Duologues. The advice is only against a tiresome series; many times in the progress of a play you will have recourse to duologue, or dialogue between two people. This is legitimate. But a long scene in which two people sit or stand and merely *tell* each other things which could be better presented in another form is out of place in the theater. A play made up of such situations, one following another, is a badly constructed play.

A duologue of any length at all must be very dramatic or interesting, full of action in the playwriter's sense. Even if the conversation or argument appears quiet, there must be something—an

undercurrent—which keeps the play moving in the mind of your audience. In Henri Bernstein's *The Thief* is an act of nearly forty-five minutes, in which appear only two characters, the man and his wife. The act is one of ever-increasing drama and intensity, until the curtain. It is a masterpiece in its way. Again, in *Mrs. Dane's Defense*, by Henry Arthur Jones, we have a similar scene between the Judge and Mrs. Dane—one of harrowing interest, as the woman is caught in one lie after another, and finally breaks down. In Bernstein's *Israel* is a scene between mother and son of considerable length and power, one which puts great strain on the acting abilities of both players. These three examples will point what I mean by "dramatic, full of action."

As you begin your dialogue and the actual use of the play-form, never let one important fact escape you. Your play will be presented solely by the actions, manner, and speech of actors. Not a word of yours, except what may legitimately find place in the printed bill of the play, will reach the public through any other medium.

The "lines." All that the actors speak in the course of a play is known to the profession as "the lines." An actor "studies his lines," he "forgets his lines," or, more colloquially, "goes up in his lines," et cetera. By the "lines of a play" is meant, therefore, what the laity calls the dialogue.

In modern drama, these lines are as nearly like the language of everyday people as the writer's skill

will allow. The difference between what one writer calls "conversational sloppiness" and good dramatic dialogue is a very strong dividing line between tyro and expert. The latter writes as people talk, but he always "picks up his sentence by the right end." That is because entirely natural speech may become prosy or incoherent. Unless the tedium or incoherence have value for the plot, no dramatist desires either the one or the other in his play. Almost everyone who writes can give a fair imitation of the conversation of a number of people collected together at one place. Almost anyone can present such a conversation in an entirely natural manner. But when each sentence, each movement, however natural it may *appear*, is in reality carrying the plot directly forward, is in addition showing the personality of the character who is moving or speaking, it is a vastly different affair.

It is because of this expository, building quality of the dialogue that the naturalness of the lines is only a seeming. It must appear spontaneous, when it is really deliberate. Here, as usual, the "art that conceals art" produces the most realistic effect.

Broken sentences. One very successful method of producing a semblance of everyday life is by means of broken sentences. That is, a character starts to say something, then turns his sentence and rephrases it—a thing real people do every day. It gives the impression that the speaker is really talking just as the thoughts occur to him instead of voicing a cut-and-dried speech carefully studied and re-

hearsed. Like all effective methods, it must be used properly, and can be easily overdone. A character can interrupt himself or another break in on his remarks up to a certain point. Beyond that point it grows as tiresome as constant interruptions in a real-life conversation. A certain dramatist, who much advocated the use of broken sentences as a means to conversational realism, so far offended in this respect in one of his manuscripts that his people gave an impression of positive rudeness. The interruptions from other characters could have been caused only by ill-breeding in real life. The writer himself was far from being either boorish or careless; he merely had carried a good thing too far.

Getting information to the audience. Writers often struggle with this effort to be entirely natural while wasting no unnecessary time in getting information to the audience. George M. Cohan graphically describes such a struggle. "In the third act of *Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford* I had placed Wallingford in his office, and at the opening of the act I wanted Judge Lambert, his attorney, to come in and tell him that he, the lawyer, had just received a call from the Board of Directors of the Tack Company, and that they had just left his office with the avowed intention of coming there (to Wallingford) to denounce the promoter. The problem of explaining the presence of the attorney in Wallingford's office in advance of the directors who had started ahead of him, and doing it without taking up time, kept me guessing for one whole night

and the best part of the next day, when I solved it by making Lambert say: 'Yes, they left my office five minutes ago, but I took the short-cut through Pearl Street.'"

There you have it: a whole explanation in one short, simple sentence, in keeping with the character and the situation, seemingly spontaneous, yet costing this author many hours of anxious thought.

On the other hand, in the work of the novice we have the following result: This author realized that it was necessary for the audience to know that his heroine was possessed of broad sympathies, since much turned on the fact. Here was a case where this characteristic could be developed in several different ways, since it was part of the plot and necessary to our understanding. Thus far, the author was right; he felt the necessity for the information. But, instead of showing it with seeming naturalness, he chose a method out of keeping with the woman's position and dignity, with the situation, or with reality, because he tried to do it in one or two sentences, where the point was of sufficient consequence for larger development. Though the wife of an important official, and duly impressed with her husband's importance (she always spoke of him by his title), her creator permitted her to practically ask a poor suppliant—a woman of whom she knew nothing, whom she had never seen before—to call her by her Christian name within a few speeches of their meeting. Here was a psychologically wrong method used with most commendable intention; with all the

character's benevolence, she was a society woman and probably used to being addressed, even by old acquaintances, by her married name. What she was called was a point that really would not have counted with her at all. Emphasis on it conveyed another impression than the author wished.

Platonic dialogue. Since the lines must be entirely pertinent to the subject of your play, two methods in frequent use among amateurs are to be decried. Play dialogue is not a series of simple questions and answers along the lines of the old Platonic and Socratic methods of imparting knowledge. Dialogue is conversation between ordinary human beings so arranged by the writer as to tell his story. Not that a series of questions and answers may not be intensely dramatic—especially if the person questioned is answering against his will—not that, if dramatic or effective, it is anything but legitimate and proper. When compatible with human procedure, it is all these. But many writers have an idea that if they have written something which is told in dialogue form—first one person speaking, then another—the result is a play. It is no more dramatic than any student's book of questions and answers. A novice's play, with a big story, was told almost entirely by this method. Five or six of the characters sat around while they asked each other questions, which drew from the questioned the answers which informed the audience of what had taken place, what was taking place, and what might, could, or would take place. All of the char-

acters knew the answers as well as the interrogator, but "Clarence, tell us again what happened yesterday," was followed by Clarence's account, and so on, *ad nauseam*. The effect was precisely that of a teacher and her class at a recitation in history.

Discussions and arguments. An audience hates to feel it is being taught something; instruction must be administered in homeopathic doses. A discussion which has a definite point in the mind of your audience may sometimes be used to advantage. That is for you to judge. It must be interesting and not too long. Incidentally, beware of riding any hobby by such means. If you have a hobby, dress it up, disguise it, be subtle. In any case, use such methods sparingly. Which brings us to the other fault mentioned, the permitting of entirely irrelevant discussions in the course of the dialogue. One play to which reference has already been made was "padded" to make it of proper length by one such discussion or debate in each one of the five acts. When the one in the first act was read—it was a racy, humorous description of a scene in the Orient—the reader felt sure that there was a dramatic purpose in the episode; someone sooner or later would come into relation with the anecdote either as to place or time—but it was only an anecdote. No further reference was made to it. Now, even an unallied anecdote may have dramatic value, if the telling or appreciation of it in any way presents or explains a character-personality, or shows the spectator the

atmosphere in which those characters move. But this one took up several pages of manuscript and, though interesting to read, led nowhere. So with each succeeding act. Please re-read in this connection what has been written on the propaganda play in the chapter on the plot. Since discussions are part of the dialogue, both anecdote and propaganda arguments belong under this heading, and are to be handled with equal care and discretion.

Narratives. The narrative form is fast dropping out of modern plays. The excited description of a horse-race—after it is over—has been done to death. To-day, if such descriptions are necessary, they are given while the race is going on—off-stage—by someone supposedly watching it. Descriptions of past events, when absolutely necessary, are given dramatically, but as briefly, simply, and *naturally* as possible.

By means of the lines and action, you are telling your story. Be sure all of that story is transferred from your mind to the play. I have said that before, but now is the time, these are the means, by which you will do it. It is not at all infrequent for a scenario to present a better drama than the finished play. One such scenario recently won a prize in a competition. It was both novel and lively. The play fell down badly in one or two places—places where the scenario held its own—almost as if two different people had written the one and the other. Yet the same brain constructed both.

Ensemble. There may be places in a play where the author wishes several characters to speak at once, or where the cries of a mob are indicated by various suggested shouts. These we might call ensemble speeches; the intention of their use is to give the "ragged" or incoherent effect of excitement. In such cases, the author may suggest the character of these exclamations or shouts by writing a number of them out in this fashion: "Cries of 'Well, I never!' 'Who ever heard of such a thing!' 'Nonsense!' and the like, are heard from the group"—leaving to the stage-director the interpolation of other kindred expressions. In all other cases, the speeches must be written out *in full.*

Left to the imagination. Plays by the novice frequently err in this direction. They are written as if in the old days of "Polichinelle" and the strolling players, when general directions were given, and the characters entered, made up their own lines, keeping them in character, yet varying them with the different audiences and players. I have read whole scenes blocked in in this manner—not in the scenario, where the method would be correct, but in the finished play supposedly ready for production.

Also, such a direction as the following will be given, "Goes to the telephone and talks," when the telephone is indicated as being in sight and hearing of the audience, and no one else is on the stage. There are times when to do this in "dumb-show" is correct; but *someone* will have to write the conversation—if it is meant to be heard. It might just as

well be the author, and the lines should, of course, be pertinent to the matter in hand.

There is all the difference in the world between this neglect and what might seem a similar stage-direction in *The Woman.* But, in the latter case, the silent conversation has a constructive reason. The man enters a telephone-booth, and before shutting the door, asks the operator to remove the head-piece so that not even she can hear him. The pause is very brief but dramatic, because while the audience knows in a general way what he is saying, there is suspense in the fact that the person to whom he is speaking is part of the mystery. As you see, the stage-instructions might have been similar to those with which I have found fault. But the actor's lines regarding secrecy make it not even a parallel case; the conversation is not intended for the audience.

Local color, and dialect. One more suggestion before we get down to the actual speeches and their relation to the characters. This has reference to local color and dialect. The latter is better understood if not too exact in its resemblance to the original. A Scotchman playing a Scotch part in *The Little Minister* told me that if he were really to break loose in the actual dialect which he was supposed to be using, not ten people—supposing there were so many native Scots in the audience—would know what he was talking about. He got his effect more by his accent than by any real dialect.

But, aside from dialect, there are other matters

in regard to presenting local color which must be taken into consideration: the use of slang words and sentences which are unintelligible outside of their own place. A sample from a play will explain. The word *strike* in mining localities has reference to a discovery of ore: the miner has "made a strike," and talks of a "pay-strike," et cetera. It so happens that the more usual understanding of the word is associated with labor agitations. Therefore, when a dramatist has a character speak of the "strike" in the Daisy Mine, the layman is a little uncertain as to which is meant, since either might be the cause of excitement. Now, the dramatist must not offend any miners who may slip into his audiences, and if there is no other word possible under the circumstances, *strike* he must use. But it must rest in such a context and among such incidents as to leave no doubt in the auditor's mind, unless drama rests on that very point—the misunderstanding of the two meanings.

Always remember in presenting a play of strongly local color that if it is successful, it will be presented in cities far from its playground. You must carry that local color to each of those cities; but you must also make allowances for the fact that a majority of your auditors will know nothing of the place and the people, except as you show them. You will not have the novelist's advantage of long explanatory descriptions.

Technical phraseology. In your audience will be people of all kinds of minds and interests. Therefore,

you must not only be careful in the use of local color and dialect, but in the employment of expressions too technical in form to be understood by anyone not accustomed to their use. If your play is written around Wall Street, for instance, use enough of the phraseology of the Street to color your play, and give it atmosphere; but do not bury it in ticker-tape, or else numbers of people, especially women not interested in stock speculation—and they make up the major part of our audiences—will be at a loss as to your full meaning. It is apt to be so in any subject upon which you may be an enthusiast. You let the theme run away with you, forgetting the uninitiated. Write your play around what subject you wish, but remember those of us unfamiliar with it, and so present it in character and language that all will understand. An example outside the theater will point my moral. Two men were to lecture—to two different audiences—concerning a certain piece of machinery, the invention of one of them. These audiences were composed of men interested in the purposes for which the machinery was to be used, but of all trades and professions. The inventor was an engineer of wide technical knowledge, his education along these lines covering study abroad as well as at home. The other knew this piece of machinery by practical association with it, and a thorough working knowledge of its uses. He had never so much as looked inside of an institute of technology. But, when it came to the lectures, the engineer was almost unintelligible to his audience,

so academic were his explanations, so purely technical his expressions. The other man was simplicity itself. His audience understood, because his lecture, of necessity, was free of phrases incomprehensible to the layman.

CHAPTER XIV

FORM OF DIALOGUE

THE SOLILOQUY—THE ASIDE—FACIAL EXPRESSION—PANTOMIME—SPEECHES SUITED TO CHARACTERS——ACTIONS SUITED TO CHARACTERS—DESCRIPTIONS OF ONE CHARACTER BY OTHERS—SPEECHES EASY OF RENDITION — LITERARY SPEECHES — COMEDY LINES—LONG SPEECHES

Two once popular methods of imparting information to an audience, the soliloquy and the aside, have of late years dropped into almost complete disuse. In the chapter on the Theater you were told why the method was once so popular: the audience was actually on the stage with the players.

The soliloquy and the aside. With the exception of some sudden exclamation, people in real life do not "think out loud" as a general rule, unless there is something the matter with them. Always bear in mind the fact that you must have your actors talk and behave in your play as the characters would speak and act were they alive. Your audience plays an important part in your drama, but its part is a mental one. A modern audience prefers to *see* its actors think, rather than *hear* them. It may require more facial expression, it is certainly more difficult

for the player, but it is more nearly like life. In that excellent play, *The New Sin*, "Hilary Cutts" receives a letter, which he reads when alone in his sitting-room. This occurs in Act Four, which is not contained in the published edition, but was added for American production. Not so much as an exclamation escapes him, but we know from the expression of his face, and the comfortable way in which he settles back in his chair after he has finished it and put it in his pocket, that it has contained good news. Later on, in its proper place, we learn the actual contents of the letter. Of course, it was a case where the dramatist had to put his faith in what the actor would do with the scene. But recall Alfred Sutro's remark in an earlier chapter in regard to the relationship of actor and author: the dramatist must trust the actor with work worth while.

The audience is no longer directly addressed by the characters, except in the various forms of musical pieces, from grand opera to burlesque. Anything you want the audience to know must be told to some other member of the cast.

Clayton Hamilton makes a very apt distinction in soliloquies, dividing them into constructive and reflective. The former are used by the unskillful writer to help tell the story or explain some missing factor which the author feels he cannot get "over" any other way. The reflective soliloquy, on the other hand, used carefully, has its place and is humanly and dramatically possible. In real life there might be some tense situation in which a person would not

be his entirely sane self and would be more than likely to talk his thoughts half audibly. It would be more akin to muttering than actual speech, though it might culminate in a viva voce ejaculation; wherever your guide is real life you are fairly safe. Or a moment or so of silent thought might terminate in an audible "I'll do it" or some kindred phrase. Therefore, it cannot be said that the soliloquy is absolutely never used in modern plays. But that it is used sparingly is true; that it requires skill to write with complete naturalness is even more true; that an unskilled actor is liable to spoil it for you even then, because of the difficulty presented in making the unnatural appear the natural, is truest of all. As a rule, the best writers avoid it altogether, unless for definite dramatic reasons. As always, the sudden, half-audible exclamation is exempt from this criticism. The reason is simple: the characters in the play should be aware only of themselves and their problems. They are supposedly unaware that their affairs are being watched. Therefore, though actually his voice and gestures are adjusted to its hearing and sight, the actor must appear utterly oblivious of his audience. A concrete example will illustrate: In *Brewster's Millions*, Harrison, who has been speculating with Brewster's money, enters his office to find no one there but the stenographer. He goes rapidly to the ticker, picks up the tape, muttering the figures under his breath. What those figures are does not matter. Only the drawn face, the trembling hands of the actor tell that the quotations

are going the wrong way, and the audience is prepared for the tense exclamation, "Wiped out!" as Harrison drops the tape and hastily leaves the office. Here is a natural, audible aside, spoken in a stage-whisper, so that it is easy to imagine the stenographer does not hear. The aside, though meant by the author for the audience's information, is not so intended by the character. We are to suppose the exclamation addressed to his own stricken conscience.

In the olden days of the drama, Harrison's scene would have been so written and played that the presence of the girl would have been completely ignored, while the actor raved over his losses in long emotional speeches, and the audience kindly agreed to believe the stenographer stricken temporarily deaf, dumb, and blind.

Since the soliloquy and the aside, incorrectly used, are almost invariable faults of the novice, digest the comparison carefully.

An intrusion. Of late, in certain articles, especially those written by critics who feel the influence of the Continental schools, we find a tendency to predict the return of soliloquies to the modern stage. We can only hope it is a false alarm. The prediction has come about through certain recent revivals in which stage-asides to the audience have been used. Yet every time they were so used, they intruded, and in every case a better way of conveying the information could have been found. It is at best a clumsy makeshift, showing that the writer lacked the skill to land his point in a more natural way, or

at the time of writing his play felt no necessity for trying. To be entirely natural, in art, is the real difficulty in being artistic. And a long soliloquy, no matter how beautiful its language, is an unpardonable intrusion of "fine writing" caused perhaps by the author's vanity and his own desire to be in his play. A modern actor is not supposed to be playing before an audience at all; conscious of its presence, he yet must give the impression that he has no concern with anything outside the mimic scene he is playing. A finely-written rhetorical speech brings the character speaking it out of the illusion of his part and reminds us he is only acting. The best future of the drama does not consist in going backward.

. . . . . .

Speeches suited to characters. All the foregoing has reference to general directions regardless of the nature of the play or its people. It is now assumed that your characters are ready to speak for themselves. Your preliminary work on the scenario has helped you in this. You are no longer speaking; they have become your means of expression and, as has been said, must have for you a very real existence. It is, therefore, most necessary that no speech be given to any character to which that character, were he alive, would not give voice. If certain facts must be made known to the audience, speeches concerning them must be given to the right people in the play. For example: To emphasize some matters you wish presented, you have decided that certain

opinions must be uttered by someone, to prepare the minds of your audience for those facts. We will say that these opinions are worldly-wise, sophisticated, possibly daring. You would, therefore, put the speeches into the mouth of the character most likely to hold such opinions—possibly a widow, a married woman, certainly one not too young. Also, you would have her say them, not to just anyone, but to the person most apt to be interested, or in line with your plan of development. Unless you have a deliberate intention in so doing, it would be psychologically false to have them repeated by an innocent village maiden to her bucolic swain.

Speeches must also be written after the manner, according to the personality, of your created character. Take the previous example. If the woman who is to speak these lines necessary for your plot development is an embittered woman, you would write them seriously, with the tang of disappointed hopes. If, on the other hand, she happens to be a dashing widow—a type dear to the stage—they would be written in another tempo, gay, impudent, daring.

From this you will see that, though these characters are your medium, they are not mere mouthpieces for your thoughts and ideas. As water takes the shape of the vessel which holds it, so these new-born beings must give "shape" or form to your thought. If they do not, send them to Kipling's Inferno of Departed Creations at once, and create new ones who *can* express your ideas as you wish. Your people will then be human and not puppets.

Actions suited to characters. Not only the speeches but the actions of your people must be in harmony with their personality and characteristics. If you want someone to leave an important letter on top of the upright piano, give the act to some character whose carelessness you have established, and not to the precise old-maidenish person who would not be likely to allow an important paper out of his hands, much less place it on anything so frivolous as a piano. The exception only proves the rule. If you wish to show that our precise gentleman is for once terribly upset and excited, the act mentioned is just about the sort of thing his distraction would cause him to commit. All of which was said in another way in the chapter on the characters; it cannot be too often repeated.

One character described by another. Do not allow your people to be described at length by other characters while the person is not present or has not yet made his first appearance. Mark, I say "at length." The characters should speak for themselves, and remarks made about them by other characters should be only enough to arouse our interest or curiosity, and should give no sign that such remarks are for our information. His actions while on the stage, his lines, the attitude toward him of others in the cast, all express his personality to much more purpose than the old-fashioned method. You may even hurt your play if you have caused your audiences to expect something totally different from the effect produced by the actual performance. Why tell

us, for instance, of the wonderful courage and strength of a character through the mouths of others in the play, if he is never given an opportunity to display his courage, or the part is played by an actor who does not look as if he could push the dining-room table across the floor! Such a description might do in farce, when the character was obviously not meant to live up to it; but in more serious plays all we ought to learn about a character from others should be just enough to whet our interest.

Speeches suited to the emotion. If it is necessary to suit your speeches to your characters, it is doubly necessary to suit those speeches to the emotion. If the situation is one of great intensity, what the player calls "a good acting scene," the speeches must be adequate. This does not mean that they must be rhetorical. You could hardly make a worse dramatic error. People in real life, under strong or violent emotion, do not pick and choose their words.

Easy of rendition. Your phrases and sentences should be easy of rendition, so the tongue will not trip over them. "She sells sea-shells" is funny in its place, but a phrase of equal alliteration in the middle of a big emotional scene would spoil it for the greatest actor on earth. A good plan is to read every sentence in your dialogue aloud as if you yourself were speaking to someone else; a sentence that does not read with the utmost ease must be twisted until it does. You may have to eliminate what you consider the gem of the play, but cut it out ruthlessly if it is not "talkable."

Literary speeches. Of course, you may have a character to whom it will be in keeping to give didactic, "literary" speeches. But the actor who plays such a part will, of necessity, render those lines slowly. Pedantry in ordinary people is tiresome. A certain play had for one of its opening scenes something like this: A farmer entered, and began to search his pockets for a match, without success. Now, most of us can guess what the average farmer would say under the circumstances. This was not a bad play, and yet that unfortunate man was made to remark: "I ever need a match, and yet I ever fail to find one."

A really fine play presented a short time ago in New York was ruined because the translator had adapted it into University English, and the poor actors struggled with words of three and four syllables through speeches which read like a treatise on literature.

This is one reason why a play which acts well very often does not read well, and the reverse. And the test of a play is its acting quality. One has to mentally act it to get its effect, and this takes experience; which is why, as has been said, one's non-professional friends are such incompetent critics of a play-manuscript. If it reads well, they think it a good play; on the contrary, from the theatrical standpoint, it may be a very bad one.

Comedy lines. If emotional scenes can be spoiled by unemotional speeches, or speeches not quite equal to the scene, comedy is ruined by "uncomic" lines.

The comedy relief in most plays to-day is as much a part of the story as the serious scenes. Therefore, it must never be forced. I remember reading a scene in which the situation was really funny. The author was aware of the situation, since he had purposely created it, yet the characters had to speak some of the saddest lines I ever read. It would have been better to let the episode speak for itself than to snow it under with talk.

To be flippant or facetious in dialogue one must also be snappy. A speech of this nature, too long drawn out, will fail of its effect. It will be much like the story whose comic features a bad raconteur insists on repeating. Incidentally, facetiousness in dialogue is not always funny; it is so easy for it to become clownish or tiresome.

Long speeches. Try not to have your speeches too long. A speech which would not seem long in a story is really so in a play, because it must be rendered aloud, and that method takes longer. Break it up in some way—by action, by interruptions, or by any natural means. It is a rare thing in real life for a person to talk straight ahead for five minutes or more without some movement, or expression, or remark on the part of the other person or persons. Unless of an unusual quality, long speeches have much the effect of the missionary sermon of which Mark Twain told. At the beginning he was willing to give several hundred dollars—but when the missionary finally finished his long-dragged-out address, his tired listener *stole* two pennies from the plate.

The long speech puts you very much at the mercy of mediocrity in acting. If used, its content should be so dramatic in interest as to make it "actor-proof." To go to real life for examples: I have known a group of ordinarily restless people listen in utter silence to a soldier of the Spanish-American War describing the march through Bloody Bend, and all that he personally saw of the campaign in Cuba. His telling of the story was simple, in many instances almost emotionless. He could have told the same story in bad English—it would not have mattered. He was an eye-witness, the war was just over, his subject was of thrilling interest to his auditors. Yet, even here, an occasional exclamation of horror or amazement, a quickly-drawn breath, perhaps a hasty question, were frequent interruptions. Again, another group of the same mixed variety was held with absorbed attention listening to a woman's description of the experiences of a survivor of the wrecked *Titanic*, a relative of her own. These were subjects on which it would have been well-nigh impossible to be uninteresting.

But how many of us have known the experience of hearing some trivial episode described by two different people? One has made us shriek with laughter, because his quick wit had seen all the humor of the situation and his gift of telling a good story has made an ordinary affair exciting. The other does not know how to tell an amusing tale, and we are bored—though the subject is the same.

Carry these experiences directly to your play-

dialogue. If your long speech has a dramatic reason for existence, use it and it will "get over." If it is trivial or badly written, a good actor may conceal the fact for you; a bad one will certainly "show you up."

Suppose you have created a chatterbox for special reasons. Long speeches to show this fact would not only be exceedingly tiresome, but really unnecessary. The constant talking of the character is rather indicated than acted out. He or she enters as if just finishing a long speech, or exits, in the midst of one supposed to continue after the exit—talks rapidly and with the effect being given that there is still more to come; but, if the playwright knows his business, the audience is not inflicted as are the friends of the talker.

CHAPTER XV

IDIOSYNCRASIES OF THE DIALOGUE: EMPHASIS

UNWIELDY WORDS—EXCLAMATIONS—CONSISTENCY—TRANSITIONS—LANGUAGE—SLANG—PUNS—VULGARITY—EMPHASIS—"PLANTING"

Unwieldy words. I have spoken of the use of "untalkable" sentences; avoid also unwieldy words. The tongue is apt to trip on them, especially if they find place in speeches intended for rapid delivery. Use the shorter, simpler words wherever your characters permit you to do so. Give your people phrases and sentences made up of every-day expressions.

Exclamations. It will perhaps appear curious to many that I should feel impelled to take space just here to say a few words about the use of exclamations. These are so free and spontaneous with people generally that instruction on the matter would appear superfluous. Yet I have been forced frequently to correct the misuse of exclamations—ejaculations as unsuited to the emotion as inadequate speeches for intense scenes. For instance: In a very good little one-act play, a man exclaims: "My! The very air seems filled with gloom and forebodings!" The average man, under similar circumstances, op-

pressed with fears and a guilty conscience, would be more apt to exclaim, "God! What a night!" or some equally strong yet simple exclamation. But the use of the trivial "My!" is farcical under such conditions.

Also, we have the unusual, the individual exclamation. When the play is written around some historical character who had an idiosyncrasy in the shape of a particular exclamation or oath, the author makes use of it. Who ever read a play or story of Henry of Navarre without meeting frequently his famous "Ventre Saint Gris!"? Or, in a modern play, an author may intentionally give a character some such peculiarity; the effect produced is usually that of comedy. But in dealing with characters of your own creation in scenes of serious or tragic intent, avoid the unusual or odd exclamation. Such expressions are used to produce an effect, to show some kind of emotion—that is all. There is no necessity for attracting attention to the exclamation itself. One such ejaculation was uttered in the midst of a very strong scene in a play read a little while ago, and so different was it from the common expressions of people in the grip of such feelings it positively interrupted the action. Thus, instead of being the exclamation wrung from a man under strong emotion, as the author intended, it failed of its purpose because of too much originality.

Lines that impede. Always your story must be a-marching. If it impedes the action, clever talk is not clever. Cut out your most cherished lines, if

they do not belong. Treasure them in a book if you like; leave them out of the play. What does belong will be all the stronger for its appropriateness.

Incidents or particulars necessary to the development of the story must not be related by one character to another in the play who would naturally know as much as the narrator of those matters. It spoils the illusion. If your audience must know of them, they may be told in a more natural manner; the person addressed must be someone supposedly ignorant of them. Sometimes, in a scene in which two people are recalling facts by way of reminiscence—a natural method—it might be permissible, though not to any great extent. In any case, there must be reasons why the narrator chooses his particular auditor. This emphasizes a previous remark about addressing speeches to the proper people. I frequently repeat myself to keep certain rules always in your mind. Look upon such repetitions not as accidental, but as a matter of emphasis.

Consistency. In your dialogue, which is by way of being your expression of your character-drawing, be consistent. To present even the most important ideas, do not allow your people to suddenly change their individuality and general viewpoint, and express opinions utterly at variance with anything their previous acts and utterance would have led us to expect. If you have purposely created a character given to sudden and inexplicable mental gymnastics, well and good. In such a case, the audi-

ence understands your intention. Otherwise, the more intelligent will simply think you have forgotten your own people; the others will be bewildered by your complete change of base.

Transitions. Make your transitions with some semblance of the natural order of things. If you are writing a quarrel scene, you can work it up a trifle more rapidly than in real life; but, unless you have previously presented one of the participants as quick of temper, give them time and cause for anger and the quarrel. Take them by carefully arranged transitions of mood, step by step, to the climax. It is wrong to keep them level on one step and then drop them with a thud to the bottom of the flight so suddenly and unexpectedly as to force on your audience a kaleidoscopic change of impressions. The exceptions will suggest themselves easily: the caddish insult with the quick blow in response, and similar situations. But in many a novice's play, where it is designed to have two characters quarrel, the fight is what grips the mind of the author. The causes and development seem to him unnecessary. It is like turning the page on one set of people to find another group on the other side. You may apply this example of a quarrel-scene to any other big emotional climax to which you have led your characters too suddenly.

So much for the manner and method of the dialogue. Something must be said as to the form.

Language. Language has not the rhetorical importance in the acted drama that it has in the purely

literary or poetic play. But it has a very live importance in the matter of its relation to your contemplated effect. By its use you intend to express your characters, the atmosphere in which they move, and the plot which they are developing. Therefore, the language used by each character should be only such as would be natural to him. By its means we receive an impression of his personality, whether he is clever or foolish, ignorant or educated, a boor or a gentleman. He cannot appear as an uncouth country yokel and converse in Addisonian English. Neither can he be a recently landed Scandinavian peasant and make his remarks in the correct terms of upper Fifth Avenue. He cannot be an impassioned boy and use the coolly deliberate phrases of a lecturer. Thus the language of your dialogue expresses the type of people and their surroundings, aiding materially, by this means alone, in establishing your exposition of plot. In this matter of the form of the language, consistency and naturalness are paramount. Many writers, especially those just beginning, have a dread of writing as they would talk. In fiction this is a fault, but it is one which in many instances passes us by in the rush of the story. In playwriting, it is a calamity.

In dealing with plays laid in other times and places than the now and here, this consistency must be carried to the language of your characters so that they do not offend our knowledge of those times and places. The New Yorker of two hundred years

ago did not talk as does the Gothamite of to-day. Here again your language assists in the creation of your intended effect. Try to use the language of the particular period as it has come down to us. Any attempt to be distinctly modern and colloquial in a play laid, for instance, in the London of Elizabeth is an anachronism, permissible only in broad burlesque. This very modernism on such a subject in itself creates the atmosphere of burlesque, and again the language used has served its purpose. For instance, a Biblical play written on a serious subject by a young amateur offended grossly in this respect, by the use of absolutely local slang and distinctly modern and new expressions. These had crept in in conjunction with attempts at the dignity of the beautiful phrases of the Bible narrative. Charles Rann Kennedy succeeded where an amateur failed. In *The Terrible Meek* he has the soldiers at the foot of the Cross speak with the harsh and homely language of the man-in-the-ranks of to-day. But there is no loss of dignity, because it is done intentionally to bring a great subject into the hearts of the present generation; while the language is modern, it is not trivial. Also, as the entire scene is played in the dark, the contrast between the uniforms of Roman soldiers and the language of Tommy Atkins is not forced on us. The whole effect is intentionally mysterious.

The writer should follow the language of a particular period closely enough to create atmosphere and character, without copying it so abjectly as

to be unintelligible to modern ears. It is a point where a nice balance is necessary.

Slang. We have spoken of slang. Judiciously used, when put into the mouths of the proper people, it has value in creating the effect of everydayness. But do not try to create a slangy character if you are comparatively unfamiliar with the slang of the day. It is a curious fact that when attempted under such circumstances, the author will go to lengths that would make George Ade sit up. This is especially true if the slangy character is a woman. Since all kinds of slang look alike to him, the writer, knowing little of how much and what kind of slang a nice woman can use and still be nice, will give her speeches of which a Billingsgate fish-wife might be ashamed. It is truly surprising how often this mistake occurs. It moves me to repeat my advice: do not write of things outside your experience and comprehension.

Beware of puns! I mean, your puns. If you have created a character whose sin is punning, make him, for that reason, the butt of the other characters. Only then will he be funny. In one play which never saw the footlights, the greater part of the comedy depended entirely on puns: good puns, bad puns, silly puns—and nothing else!

Vulgarity. A question came to me not long since as to how to express a big and serious situation without being risqué or vulgar. It brings us back to the effect you wish to produce. Such a matter can only lie in the mental outlook of the writer.

When one is handling a big or bold subject it must be handled bravely and boldly. If there is no nastiness latent in the situation or in the mind of the writer, if his intention is to treat the matter seriously, it will be difficult for him to be vulgar. Vulgarity and the risqué in themselves imply nastiness. You remember the statuette in Hichens' novel, *The Woman with the Fan?* Without the fan, it was simply a classic little figure of a nude woman; with the fan, it became a naked woman, all the classic suggestion gone. It is so in your dialogue. The subject in both is apparently the same—the woman. The effect depends on your deliberate intention.

The important scene. Following a carefully planned scenario, it is possible to write the scenes of the play just in the order they occur. But many dramatists have found it advisable to write the, to them, most important scene or scenes first. For those who can do it, it has this advantage: after its completion it is possible to go back over the scenario, revising it in many places to help the building toward this scene. Even if you write your scenes in order, you will go back again and again to "plant" the lines or situations necessary. By "planting" a line or situation, we mean any preliminary emphasis on information or characterization.

Emphasis. It is, therefore, necessary for the dramatist to emphasize or plant facts necessary to the development of the plot. There are many ways of doing this. It is not enough to have some slight allusion made to such a matter several scenes or even

acts before the information is required, else it is lost and forgotten. "Most dramatists," says Clayton Hamilton, "in the preliminary exposition that must always start a play, contrive to state every important fact at least three times: first, for the attentive; second, for the intelligent; and third, for the large mass that may have missed the first two statements."

Planting a situation. Without too apparent insistence, important matters must be driven home; the way must be prepared for the dénouement. It may be managed by speeches here and there, or by stage business, or movements. For example, in Augustus Thomas' *The Witching Hour*, an absolutely unpremeditated murder is committed by a boy, in the home of a friend, the uncle and guardian of the girl he loves. The implement of attack is a large and very heavy paper-cutter. To emphasize the lack of premeditation, or deliberate intention to kill, Thomas has various members of the cast pick up that paper-cutter, play with it, lay it down—until the audience becomes acquainted with its appearance and weight, also with the fact that it is an ordinary feature of the room's furnishings. Then, when the boy picks it up and blindly attacks his tormentor, the audience realizes without any further explanation the suddenness of his rage and the instinctive seizing of the first thing under his hand.

A good and simple example of how a situation may be planted can be drawn from an episode in *Within the Law*. The third act is laid in the millionaire's

library. A very dramatic surprise is caused by a sudden flash of light through an open window of a darkened room, which reveals a dead man on the floor. To have no preparation for this flash would leave the mind of the spectator divided between interest in the scene and the query as to what had caused the sudden light. The interest must not be divided; to guard against it and satisfy the audience with an explanation, a scene is prepared earlier in the act. Two men are talking, the host and a visitor. Suddenly the light flashes through the window. "What was that?" asks the visitor. "That's the searchlight from the Metropolitan Tower; it flashes around here every fifteen minutes. It won't trouble you again." And he draws the curtains. The situation is "planted." No need for us to see the flash every fifteen minutes. We can even forget all about the light. But when again we see it at the crucial moment, we share in the dramatic shock of the situation; the interest is entirely on the plot, and not on the light.

Following is an example on the negative side from an unproduced play-manuscript, where emphasis is not laid on the exposition. The play is on occult lines, and in the last act the hero suddenly sees a picture in a crystal which tells him of a tragedy which touches him nearly, occurring some distance away. Now, "crystal-gazing" is not an everyday affair; many people know nothing about it. Yet the only previous reference to it was in the first act, when one character presented the crystal in its

ivory setting to the hero's sister, with a few comments and an effort on the part of the hero to "see." There were many places where his increasing ability in this line could have been shown, or even a few lively discussions on crystal-gazing between a skeptic and himself—anything of dramatic interest to prepare the audience for an understanding of his horror at the final image.

CHAPTER XVI

DRAMATIC ACTION

ACTION—KNOWLEDGE OF THE EFFECT—EMPTY PAUSE—DRAMATIC PAUSE—STORY KEPT MOVING—BUSINESS—REALISM—STAGE-DIRECTIONS

Action. "Action," as the word is used in the theater, may have one or both of two meanings. In its ordinary sense it simply means movement, something happening. Dramatically, it means the whole course of events, or in a lesser degree, all that makes up a situation, from the mental undercurrent to the grouping of the figures. Since it is correctly used with both these meanings, and since no other word entirely fills its place, I have used it in both ways; I think the context will usually make clear which meaning you are to understand. A manager may say to a writer: "There's no action in your play." He means that nothing happens which is of real interest or importance, though the writer may feel he has provided plenty of "action" by keeping his people in constant motion. Dramatic action need not mean physical motion at all. It is the "getting somewhere" with your story, the unraveling of your plot, which constitutes action as understood by dramatists. The method depends on the effect you

desire to produce. Always mental, the appeal may be entirely intellectual, or inspiring; or it may affect the mentality along its more primitive side, by horror, by curiosity, by laughter. Walter Pritchard Eaton says that "the sight of a man whose mere life is at stake at the point of a pistol is infinitely less interesting, dramatic, important, than the sight of a man whose soul is at stake at the point of another's ideas and inspiration."

Knowledge of effect. Lack of knowledge of what you desire the effect on your audience to be is one cause of failure in writing. The function of the drama is always entertainment in some form, whether by laughter or a good mental stir-up. Beyond hoping that they will like it, be sure you know what you want your audiences to think and feel. This knowledge and the desire to produce the effect will help you mightily in the presentation of action and the writing of dialogue. No matter what your point of view, you must remember that the audience has one also and it may not be yours. You must, therefore, *want* to produce your effect; merely knowing what it should be will not do it. An earnest ritualist of an orthodox established church did not take into his calculations the point of view of those outside the fold of his own sect and in all sincerity wrote into his play a line which to him was worthy of all reverence and solemnity—and a cosmopolitan, irreverent city found the line screamingly funny. The dramatist's *desire* to produce his calculated effect was not great enough to make him step outside his own opin-

ion and take into account the audience's sympathy and understanding.

Empty pause. A frequent blunder in the "action" of the novice's play is what we may call the empty pause. It usually occurs in this way: "Sara leaves the room; in a few minutes she returns with a book." Those "few minutes" of unprovided action and speech for the people left on the stage! And they occur again and again—pauses which would make seemingly interminable stage-waits. Do not misunderstand me; I have no reference to the dramatic pause, as necessary in play-writing as in music. But pauses such as I have mentioned, occurring at times in the play when the interest should be kept up, the action moving, are only stupid blunders on the part of the writer. Take the example given: the "few minutes" while Sara is off-stage. This interval must be filled. How? Is the book important? Or is it only necessary that she be out of the way? If the former, then she is going to get the book to show someone she has left on the stage. Unless there is some such reason, you have no right to emphasize her going for a book, but would have the book present on the scene. The person or persons on the stage must be given some piece of business depending entirely upon the reason she went. They may be bored, or impatient, or eager to see the book. They will probably speak several lines on the subject. If, on the other hand, her reason for leaving is because the dramatist wants her out of the way, then the reason he got her off-stage must be shown

during her absence, by the actions or speeches of those left, or by the entrance or exit of whichever character he wishes to have take advantage of her being gone. No *empty* moments or pauses are permitted on the stage; those that do find place are such as are themselves part of the action—a character's inability to speak under strong emotion, or a pause of expectancy at some crucial moment.

Dramatic pause. A dramatic pause is one of suspense, interest; sometimes the stage is quite empty, or, if peopled, the actors, too, are waiting, breathless. There may be but one person present, and that one may be apparently either dead or fainted. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Tess picks up the carving-knife, and exits into the room where the audience knows Alec is supposed to lie in drunken slumber. The stage is empty, the silence pregnant, as the auditors picture to themselves the scene in that room. Tess returns, the bloody knife in her hand. How long that pause has been no one stops to consider. It is more dramatic, under the circumstances, than the acted scene could possibly be.

On the other hand, a needlessly empty stage, or actors left by a careless author with nothing to do or say, while someone goes out and does some unimportant thing, and returns, is simply bad playwriting.

Such matters may seem trifles to the beginner; yet it is in just such matters as these that the novice shows his hand. The ability to tie up all the loose ends shows experience.

Story kept moving. Many novices seem to take as a motto for their work the slogan: "I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way!" To amble gently along may serve in a certain kind of novel; do not try it in a play. No matter how attractive they may be, a lot of characters wandering in and out, talking, talking—clever talk, too, sometimes—will not make a play. The story must be kept moving, with as little interruption as possible, on to the end. There must be interest, entertainment. Even if two or three people are quietly talking, with even an appearance of aimlessness, it all has definite bearing on the matter in hand. So many people seem to think that *action* means a murder every minute, or the heroine's fainting every third speech. Action, indeed; but it is not dramatic, unless it means something, and it will not make a play.

Making drama. Nor will emotional scenes or big situations, by themselves, make drama. Like every other part in the structure, they must lead somewhere, have dramatic value, belong to the action. It is not at all dramatic for you to drop your pencil. But, if you do so because you have been startled or some sudden thought has crossed your mind, the act immediately becomes important. When Angel Clare, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* remarks to Tess on their wedding-day that it is strange he has never before seen her handwriting, she knows for the first time that the letter she had written to him which would probably have prevented their marriage has

never reached him: that while she has been sure he has married her, knowing all, he has really been in ignorance and her confession is still to be made. Mrs. Fiske used to make her audiences fairly jump by suddenly dropping her pen with a clatter against a plate. And a simple speech, an ordinary act, became big with drama.

Business. When the action becomes the "business," we have the more popular meaning of the word—what the actors do as distinguished from what they say.

Realism overdone. There is a tendency with some writers to carry stage-business to a degree of realism that is not only revolting but unnecessary. Of course, the fault may lie with an actor deficient in taste, or with a stage-director. But the author can be specific enough in his directions to see that no opportunity is given for overdoing. For instance, I have seen death-scenes portrayed on the stage which passed beyond the point of dramatic effect and became only a harrowing or pathological episode which one wished finished. In one of the many versions of *Oliver Twist* prepared for the stage is one in which the death of Nancy is so bloody, so long drawn out, so terrible, that people simply shut their eyes, and in some instances leave the theater. In an old play called *The Soudan* was another death-scene, a soldier begging for water, that stays in memory as a situation to keep one away from the play, blotting out all other excellences. The fault in this latter case probably lay in the vanity of the actor. Here again

the effect you desire to produce must be your guide; you wish to thrill, to harrow, but not to drive your audience away feeling they will never come again.

Stage-directions. As a rule, I find it unsafe for the novice in the theater to fill his play with too many descriptions or suggestions for stage-business. In this direction more than any other he is apt to do the things he should not. It is best, until greater knowledge of actors and acting is acquired, not to tell them in a first-play manuscript what to do to any large extent. The movements, et cetera, necessary to the telling of the story will find place as a natural consequence of your writing. These it is safe and right to use. But as I said in the matter of scenario descriptions, the more exact and effective movements had better be intrusted to the stage-director. To show you just where the difficulty lies, a few examples will illustrate actual errors of novices in the endeavor to combine "business" and dialogue without any real knowledge of the stage. One very popular mistake is the sending of a character off the stage for a specific purpose and allowing him to return too soon to have discharged his errand. If it is not desired to allow the passage of the actual moments required, the time should be suggested by sufficient dialogue and movement during his absence to give the impression that some time has passed. In one play a man was sent off the stage with instructions from another character to go to a shop at the next corner, telephone from there, ask certain questions, one or two of which required detailed answers,

and return with these answers. The celerity with which all these things were accomplished smacked of magic. Half a dozen sentences bridged the gap; actually, he would hardly have reached the door of the house on his outward trip, before he was back, his errand satisfactorily completed. In another play, a maid was ordered to telephone for a case of champagne; in about thirty seconds, she appeared in the door to announce: "The champagne is in the ice-box."

Gestures. The advice to the novice against too detailed business is especially true when dealing with a scene of very intense emotion. On these occasions the actor is better left to himself and the stage-director. A forced gesture or movement as suggested by an amateur will not have the dramatic effect of a more spontaneous action from a trained player. In a very promising one-act play, read a little while ago, the writer had suggested for his heroine, in a moment of tense inward struggle, a gesture—carefully described in detail—which was so extravagant, so bizarre, so difficult, that people would have said, "How did she do that?" instead of thinking of the feeling causing it. In addition the actress playing the part would have stood in danger of blood-poisoning or lockjaw at every performance! In some way the writer had pictured this gesture—it was so graphically described that his mental image of it must have been clear—as something very striking and dramatic. The technical, or even the merely natural, side had not occurred to him.

CHAPTER XVII

STAGE-DIRECTIONS

TECHNICAL ERRORS—MANAGEMENT OF ENTRANCES AND EXITS—CHANGES OF COSTUME DURING SCENE—TOPOGRAPHY OF SCENE OF THE PLAY—"PADDING"—HANDLING SEVERAL CHARACTERS ON STAGE AT ONCE—INSTRUCTIONS POSSIBLE TO FOLLOW—MANNER OF WRITING BUSINESS—FARCE AND COMEDY—WIT AND EPIGRAM—COMEDY RELIEF

Technical errors. I have said it is the part of wisdom for the novice not to try to be too exact in business descriptions. It is almost as easy, however, to display one's ignorance by writing too little as by saying too much. There are instructions for business which even a novice should be able to insert in a manuscript, since they are matters which concern the development of his story; their omission makes one feel that the writer has been a trifle hazy at such points. I will give two samples from a play in which the writer showed positive evidence of dramatic instinct, with the ability to tell his story through characters, by means of dialogue. His ignorance of the actual theater was plainly displayed by many omissions and technical errors, some of which, like those I shall mention, he need not have made, in view of the ability otherwise displayed. One

direction read something like this: "Brown hands MS. to Jones." Up to that moment there had been no mention of a MS. Had Brown entered the room with it? Then the play 'script should have read, at the proper place: "Enter Brown with MS. in his hand." Was the MS. already on the desk? In the latter case, the instructions at rise of curtain should have been: "A MS. of such-and-such shape and bulk is lying on Brown's desk." In other words, the author had not visualized Brown and the MS. It simply came into being at the moment he wanted it. Consequently his play-manuscript lacked clearness.

In another instance, during a long speech and scene, the direction was given: "Telephone bell rings at proper intervals." In a scene where the bell would interrupt speeches those intervals had best be indicated in the 'script. If the author does not do it—and in this case there is no reason why even a tyro should not be able to do it correctly—the director must. It is one case where the novice need not display his ignorance of technique. The bell is a cue for the actor whose speech follows it. If it is going to ring, he will not speak his line until it is sounded, else he will not be heard. He must know just where it is to come. Also, the property-man must know what speeches to follow with his bell. At rehearsals, these matters are smoothed out, so that there need be no unnecessary pauses. But it is very simple for the writer to say, "Telephone bell rings at intervals during the following scene, and is an-

swered by Blank," in a scene where it is answered in dumbshow by someone while others are talking. Then, during the course of the scene, it is only necessary to write "Bell" at the proper places. It is very simple, yet the doing of this one little thing, or its omission, marks the difference between knowing how and *not* knowing how.

These examples are specific; but you can easily make the application in many similar cases where a little thought will tell you what to do. Errors such as these are simply lack of attention and thought.

Entrances and exits with change of costume during scene. I spoke in the last chapter of the exit and too rapid re-entrance of a character because the writer had not allowed dialogue and business enough to intervene to give the impression of the passage of time. In an entirely different way, there are several places in any play where the management of exits and entrances is a distinct matter of timing. For some reason, it may be necessary for a character to make a change of costume in the course of an act. It happens, through practice, that men and women of the stage are able to make these changes far more rapidly than other people, even more rapidly than they themselves manage it in their home lives. Among players, also, there are those whose specialty is quick-changing; they carry it so far as to make capital of it as "lightning-change artists." You have all seen plays in which one actor portrays many characters, making his changes in dress and

make-up with almost inconceivable celerity. But the fact of those rapid transitions is the novelty of the play; everyone knows it is not the usual thing. Costumes, et cetera, are especially made for the purpose of getting in and out of them quickly. Even in the two Zenda plays, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Rupert of Hentzau*, in which the two Rudolfs are always played by the same actor, the changes in costume require preparation, rehearsal—and several valets. There are, however, certain changes of costume in the modern play, which, while possible in a much shorter time than in home dressing, do require a period somewhat longer than the magic of a protean actor. For instance, I have read a play in which a woman, carefully gowned from head to foot in smart street costume, was expected to change to full evening dress—from jeweled coiffure to satin slippers—in half a page of dialogue: that is, about thirty or forty seconds! It is possible for an actor to "under-dress" (wear one suit under another) so that half the dressing is done. But it depends upon just how much of a change must be made; one cannot wear a trained skirt under a tight-fitting walking skirt, though it is possible to hide white silk stockings under black street hose. It therefore behooves you to give your characters—especially the feminine ones—time to make the necessary alteration in costume and appearance. In *The Little Minister*, in Act Three, Babbie makes a rapid change from her gypsy dress to the evening costume of Lady Barbara Rintoul. I do not remember how many minutes elapsed;

there was a short scene, after her exit, between Gavin and the French maid; a scene between Gavin, Lord Rintoul, and the Captain. There were several pauses —always one when Lord Rintoul threw open the door of Babbie's room and called, "Come out!" The actor playing it paused, if the actress playing Babbie was not waiting to enter. The pause was legitimate, giving the impression that his eyes searched the room. Also, he sometimes had to make another pause after speaking, giving the impression that naughty Babbie hesitated before her father's anger. Yet, even with this management of pauses, arrangement had to be made for the change of costume. If the star's dressing-room did not happen to be directly at her place of entrance, a temporary dressing-room had to be put up in the wings, in which her maid waited. The gypsy dress was easy to remove, and the brocade dress of the early nineteenth century was made in one piece.

I have told all this in detail to show you that the appearance of an actress in two different dresses on one page of your manuscript is something requiring a little thought, and some timing by the clock.

Topography of scene. Another earmark of the novice is his apparent forgetfulness—or his lack of imagination—of the topography of the scene of his play other than the room disclosed to the audience, which ignorance is shown by the carelessness with which he allows important people to enter and exit by doors and in directions where they would be sure to collide with other characters whom they are

not supposed to see. Take a play, for instance, in which you have indicated a room with but one door by which to reach the hall or out of doors. All characters going in or out must use this door. Unless you want them to meet in the doorway, or in the imaginary and unseen hall outside, provide enough dialogue or business for the characters remaining on the stage to allow your character time to get out of the way before supposedly meeting the other. A careless writer once sent a group of characters off by a certain door, with another group entering immediately on the exit of the first. Carried out exactly by a director, there would have been the nicest sort of a mix-up at that doorway. Nothing is haphazard in play-writing. Even this dialogue, which you are frankly writing in to give time for exit and entrance, must not degenerate into "padding." It must still be pertinent, still keep the story moving.

"Padding." In a certain play, it became necessary to keep a character on the stage during a situation in which his mere presence created suspense. So far as the lines spoken were concerned, at that particular point they were of almost no consequence. The situation, the presence of those three people at that place, was having its effect. But lines were necessary, since the one character who was unconscious of the underlying tension, must be kept in ignorance. An inexperienced writer would have let these people speak of anything at all. But this dramatist said: "Wait. If they speak of automobiles, it would serve—but motors have nothing to

do with the play. Isn't there something they can mention which will be trivial enough, and yet will help advance the plot?" Then he remembered that a pistol played an important part in the next act. The pistol was in that room. Why not speak of that? No sooner said than done. The characters were not only supplied with conversation, but the story was materially advanced because of his care in stopping to see that the lines which in one sense were only "padding" were in the picture.

Several characters on stage. Also, remember that some skill is needed in handling many characters on the stage at once. I am not speaking now of the director's business, but yours. Do not leave several characters "on" in a scene as if you had forgotten them in your interest in those who are talking. Either draw them into the dialogue, if that is your purpose, or send them off-stage legitimately. If they are people at an afternoon reception, for instance, they can be made to retire into the background in chatting groups. But do not leave John Smith out of a scene as if you had forgotten his presence. Do writers do it? Constantly. A character will have a few lines in a scene, perhaps important lines; other characters will continue the action, and no further mention of the first character will be made. Like some dim ghost, he has passed out of this scene, no exit indicated, no business to occupy him, no lines to speak.

Instructions possible to follow. Another reminder, made necessary through experience with

novice's plays: only what your characters show us by the lines they speak and by their appearance crosses the footlights. Therefore, only such things should find placé in a description as can be expressed by the actor's personality and appearance, together with the impressions conveyed by scenery and costume. Right here is the reason why long monologues and descriptive speeches are incorrect in the modern theater. The scenery and lighting take the place of the lines which were formerly given to players to tell the audience what the place was supposed to be. The rule, however, remains the same. Everything of importance necessary for the audience to know which cannot be conveyed through the eye *must* appear in the dialogue. Business instructions are meant solely for the actors and the directors. Even in a published play, while the instructions may read more smoothly, and in fuller and unabbreviated sentences, this idea is kept. Never set down in these instructions things humanly impossible of portrayal.

For instance: a description reads, "Mary is a woman of thirty, who takes care of her widowed mother." Very interesting in the text. But, unless in the lines given to Mary or some other character in the play mention is made of her mother, what does the audience know, or care, about it?

There is a good story told which illustrates my point. A certain famous English actress gave up her part in a play by an eminent novelist. When asked why, she exclaimed: "With the first rehearsal my troubles began. But, when I discovered in the

second act, where I was to make my entrance, the stage-business was, 'Enter Mary, having had a cup of tea,' I gave up. It wasn't that I did not try. Indeed, I tried for days to look as if I'd been freshly tea'd. Then I threw up the part. I believe the play was not a success," she added viciously.

To repeat: no matter what your gift of language, never let yourself forget your medium. The man who writes a play can sometimes write a readable novel, though he rarely tries. On the other hand, the trained novelists who can write successful drama are few and far between. The foregoing story may be some sort of an explanation. J. M. Barrie is one shining, notable example of one of these rare exceptions. And his play, *What Every Woman Knows*, is an excellent example of real dramatic literature.

Manner of writing "business." Just a few words about the manner of writing your business. I have said that the language of the dialogue is dependent on the characters, the period, the place. The language of the business descriptions intended for a play-manuscript to be used by a director in a theater should be simple, direct, to the point, and as short as possible. I spoke of this in the chapter on the scenario; it is even more pertinent here. Lengthy, or facetious, or verbose descriptions break into the reading of the action and are best avoided. When a play is revised for publication, all that is necessary is the changing of the language from the technical to the ordinary, omitting abbreviations. Al-

ways use the present tense in writing descriptions. What was or will be belongs to the dialogue. The business shows us what *is*.

Farce and comedy. In writing farce, or comedy, the effect is produced by a judicious mixture of lines, business, and situation. For that matter, all dramatic effect is achieved by the same means. In farce, frequently, all the fun is in the lines and their delivery. Sometimes the laugh is in the action, regardless of the line or the situation. But most often the situation is the mirth-provoker. So your laughable situation is properly a part of your scenario; this is especially true of farce. The manner of expressing those situations is a part of the play-dialogue.

It is strange that sincerity should ever be funny; but recall to your mind the times you have probably shrieked with laughter at the perfectly serious and literal way someone has taken some ludicrous situation that everyone else understood. Consequently some of the funniest lines in a play are spoken seriously by serious people. The audience stands in the place of the "everyone else" who sees through the situation. Any good comedian will tell you that he can kill his own comedy simply by realizing how funny he is. Of course, there are laughable lines meant to be spoken airily, lightly, laughingly, just as one talks in everyday life. They are pleasant, realistic, and amusing. But fun, real fun, in a play is more apt to be produced by the contrasts than by a witty line. One never quite knows when or how a laugh is to be provoked. A certain actor

had a very good scene in a play written by a dramatist who also happened to be his friend. The actor was thoroughly convinced that this scene had not a spark of comedy in it, and played it in just that spirit. To this day, he is sure that the shouts of laughter the scene received from an appreciative audience were solely caused by his performance of the part. He never could be made to see that the situation as created by the dramatist was really ridiculous. His seriousness, of course, only made it the more funny.

A comedienne showed her part to another actress during the progress of rehearsals. The friend, who really admired the other's work, said, feelingly: "It's too bad, dear; you haven't a laugh in the whole of it!" (Laugh, be it understood in this connection, means a laugh-provoking line or situation.) The comedienne felt quite uncomfortable about it—until later. Literally, she herself did not smile once, nor was any character in the piece supposed to be amused at anything she said or did. But the dignity of banal or stupid lines spoken with the utmost seriousness in situations where such lines were supremely ridiculous and unlooked for did the work the dramatist intended. His reward—and the actress's—came in the shape of peals of delighted laughter.

The famous wake-scene in *The Shaughraun* is always provocative of the heartiest laughter because the mourners are really mourning, the professional "keener," Biddy Madigan, is attending strictly to business in lamentations entirely serious, and not in the least funny. The joke lies in the fact that Conn

is the liveliest of corpses when the mourners are bowed in grief and not looking at the bier.

Perhaps the funniest line in *Bought and Paid For* is the simple question, "What make is it?" as propounded by the phlegmatic Jimmie when his rich brother-in-law offers him an automobile. His looking a gift-horse in the mouth in this matter-of-fact manner provokes unlimited mirth, because it is so utterly characteristic of Jimmie, who has not a ghost of a sense of humor himself. To ask the question any other way than with the simple directness of unimaginative stupidity would not even provoke a smile. And such a direction as to the reading of the line must have been in the writer's intention of effect, else it would not have found place in the manuscript. Hence, that laughter goes back to the creator of the part, the author, as well as its originator, the actor.

Wit and epigram. Clever or witty dialogue, scintillating with epigram and *double entendre,* is not to be written by everybody. The ability to write it is a gift, but by no means a necessary gift, to the playwright. The epigrammatist, the humorist, is very apt to let his clever dialogue swamp or obscure his plot. Dialogue is not the end of play-writing, but the means. So be witty, if you can; the main thing is, tell your story. Funny lines do not necessarily make fun. Wit and epigrams in a play, unless deliberately quoted by a character, should appear spontaneous. For instance, in Louis N. Parker's *Disraeli* the wit has the seeming of naturalness, as the

brilliant Prime Minister gives utterance to some epigram, which has since become famous. But in an Oscar Wilde play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* as a sample, the dialogue seems written in many instances to display wit, which as a consequence, clever in itself, is forced and unnatural.

Comedy relief. The use of comedy relief in a play is no longer felt to be obligatory, though some writers insist upon it. If a play really holds by its intensity, excitement and thrills take the emotional place of laughter. Dialogue in a lighter vein may legitimately have place in a serious play, however, especially at the very beginning. It need not necessarily be laugh-provoking, but merely of a nature to relieve the tension of the drama.

Whatever you do, however, in the way of comedy or farce, do not, I beg of you, explain your jokes. If they are good, they stand of themselves; if not, omit them.

It really requires skill to deftly weave one humorous situation after another into adequate dialogue, so it may safely be said that as a rule farce, real farce, should rarely be attempted by any but an expert. The occasional genius will not need, nor heed, this rule.

Clayton Hamilton explains the difference between comedy and farce in this way: "A comedy is a humorous play in which the actors dominate the action; a farce is a humorous play in which the action dominates the actors." *Actors* in this relation should be taken to mean the participants in the situations

rather than the players. In a comedy we may come close to tears or pathos for a few moments at some sweet or touching scene. In farce, the main, the whole, idea is laughter—no need of plausibility, or psychology, or even wit. The cause of the fun lies in the situations.

Beyond this reference to farce and comedy, there is no further need of touching on the divisions or kinds of plays. There are no longer any hard and fast lines drawn between them—they interpenetrate to a truly baffling degree: we have farce-comedy (pure farce is something of a rarity), comedy-drama, tragi-comedy, and so on through many and sundry combinations. When any of them is a *play*, it will not matter whether it falls under any of these divisions or descriptions, or breaks a new path for itself.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MANUSCRIPT

APPEARANCE—TYPE-WRITTEN AND HAND-WRITTEN—PAPER—BINDING—TITLE-PAGE—CAST OF CHARACTERS—SHORT CASTS—LONG CASTS—SYNOPSIS—BEGINNING OF EACH ACT—MANNER OF TYPING—HOW TO JUDGE THE ACTING TIME—THE TITLE

Appearance. A very foolish young person once said to the writer, in submitting a play for reading: "I am not a good preparer of manuscripts, and can spend my time so much more profitably—not to say more pleasantly—than in making letter-perfect copies of things." Yes, actually. There was but one answer possible, and that answer was made. You cannot spend your time more profitably than in making your manuscripts look like business. These are busy days, and managers and their readers are busy people. Why should they trouble themselves about a slovenly or careless manuscript? Besides, there are certain matters to be observed in the preparation of a play-manuscript which inevitably mark out the experienced from the tyro. These matters neglected, the manager can be moderately sure without turning the pages that the writer is utterly unskilled in this particular line, and, unless he knows something of him, will probably toss it aside with

remarks about the ubiquitousness of the amateur playwright. Carelessness is bad anywhere; when assumed in dramatic work because there are other things more important, it puts one completely out of the running. Sardou's first produced play *The Student's Tavern*, received its reading thus: The manager of the Odéon, on leaving the theater with the leading actress, turned over the heap of plays waiting reading. Sardou's neat, clear handwriting (it was before the day of the typewriter) attracted the actress's attention, and she began to read it. This is only an anecdote, but it has its value for the novice.

Few of my suggestions regarding the preparation of the manuscript are arbitrary; all have their use and advantage.

Type-written or hand-written. First of all, we come to the question of type or long-hand. The matter still seems to remain in doubt with many novices, in spite of the ever-present typewriter. Let us settle it at once: hand-written play manuscripts stand practically no chance at all with the average manager. Like everything else, there is an occasional, a very occasional, exception, especially in one-act plays. The reason is clear: with a sketch, one usually approaches the actor who wishes to use it, rather than a manager. The actor, searching for a vehicle, is apt to be more willing to look over a short play in long-hand than any manager. But if one does not know the actor, personally, the situation is practically the same as with a manager: if you are unknown to either, a hand-written manuscript im-

presses the reader with the fact that you are a novice, and your work receives scant, if any, attention. Just here, some remarks by Walter Pulitzer, nephew of the late owner of the New York *World*, emphasize what has just been said: "The advantageous policy of sending in type-written copy is so plain that a penned manuscript is at once recognized by the professional readers as the product of one who has not yet found his way into the game. The disadvantage of being spotted as a beginner in itself makes it worth one's while to have a thing type-written to avoid the handicap."

Therefore, unless influence of some kind is brought to bear to get a reading, or unless the manuscript is entered in some competition where the permission for long-hand is given among the conditions, use the typewriter.

Paper. Never use thin paper, especially the kind called onion-skin. It is always annoying to handle a manuscript typed on paper so transparent that the pages beneath show through, to say nothing of its likelihood of tearing. For the same reason, do not use pale ink. This usually results from trying to make too many manifold copies at a time. It is best to use the black carbon papers, and, if the undermost copy is pale, keep that for your own use: do not inflict the play-reader with it. Some carbon papers write green, making the last copies so pale as to be absolutely a menace to the eyesight. If a reader has many manuscripts on hand, he simply will not be bothered with copies which for any reason of type,

or ink, or binding, are difficult to read or handle. The paper should be of the usual typewriter size, $8\frac{1}{2}$ by $11\frac{1}{2}$, or thereabouts.

An authority on these matters, in a text-book for writers, says: "Use a black, or blue-black, or dark-blue, or dark-green ink, and under no circumstances a purple, or yellow, or any other color. Black or blue-black is preferable." It is hardly necessary to add: write on one side only. Also leave a wide margin at the left to allow for fastening together.

In the matter of binding your manuscripts, it is a debatable question as to which is advisable—to bind the play all in one, or with each act bound separately. Both ways have their good points, the first being sometimes used in presenting a play for copyright, or reading; the second is more usual, and is a much better form for use at rehearsal.

Prepare the play in manifold, four copies of a manuscript being the least number any dramatist should have for distribution.

Binding. The sheets of a play-manuscript are usually fastened together at the side, book-fashion. They are much more easily handled and read in this shape. Also, at rehearsal, it makes possible the writing in of business or changes, on the blank page opposite. For cover, use a very heavy paper or other strong material, not too stiff. There is a heavy, light-blue paper which is often used, and an even more useful fibrous paper of brown, called, by its various manufacturers, either paperoid or leatheroid. Heavy board is not so desirable, because of

the weight it adds to the manuscript. Had you ever seen an excited stage-director rushing around, play-book in hand, you would realize the object of making " scripts " both durable and pliable.

Title-page. On the first page, write your title, the nature of the play—Drama in Four Acts, Comedy in Three Acts, et cetera—and your name. At one of the lower corners repeat this name, with your address. If you have had the play copyrighted, this fact and the date appear on the other lower corner. The play-cover should also contain these same items of information, which are repeated on the cover of each act, together with the number of the act. It enables a play-reader to bring them together, should any one of the acts be separated from its companions.

Cast. On your second page, give your cast of characters, *in full.* Never omit it. Often I have noticed such casts, which appeared at a glance to contain, say, eight people. On reading the play, new though minor characters kept cropping up here and there, not listed. Every character with a speaking part must be contained in your cast of characters. If there are supernumeraries, the fact must also be stated. This page is frequently the first—and sometimes the only—page at which a manager looks. If he knows nothing of the writer, a long cast is apt to give him pause. But it is not wise to trick him with a false one.

Short casts. The reasons for the desirability of a short cast are obvious. A manager feels that to deal

with the unknown playwright is something of a gamble. Unless the author is paying for the production, it is the manager's money which is risked on the venture. The less initial cost he finds confronting him, the more likely he is to take that risk. A long salary list, costume plays, extravagant and varied scenery, all mean additional expenses which keep the manager from accepting a new play by a new writer. Unless the play presents unusual qualifications, few managers will care to risk a small fortune on producing it. It is well for the novice to remember these hints if he wishes his play to have even a reading.

Long casts. There is also confusion to the audience in a lengthy cast of characters. In *My Lady's Lord*, a play produced a number of years ago on Broadway, every supernumerary was given a character-name and listed in the cast with the name of the person assuming the part. One simply got lost before reaching the end of the long list of names. For that reason, often, when a writer gives one line each to several minor, and often unnamed characters, those lines are given orally by the stage-director to various of the more promising members of the supernumerary band, and they are not listed in the cast of characters. This is especially the case in a big mob scene, where individuals in the crowd shout out certain lines necessary to the play's progress. Such instances are the only places where it is permissible to leave their names out of the cast of characters, and lump them under the head of extra

actors, or "supers." The following hint can be your guide: whenever you feel that the manager will have to engage someone to play the part, no matter how small it is, that part belongs in your cast; when you feel that the line or lines can be adequately rendered by an intelligent member of the crowd of "supers," and will not require an actor especially engaged, the part need not be listed. But if your play has no supernumeraries, and there are still these extra lines to be spoken, you had better add at the end of your cast something like this: "A Man," or "Two Policemen," as the case may be. This enables the manager to tell at a glance how many people will have to be engaged. Under the cast of characters, where "supers" are required, may appear something of this sort: "Ladies and gentlemen of the Club; soldiers, civilians, ragamuffins, etc." These will all be played by the extra people.

Character names are placed in a cast in several ways. A very prevalent method to-day is to mention them in the order of their first appearance or first spoken line. In that case, the cast is headed thus: *(Characters are mentioned in the order of their first appearance.)* The next usual course is to list them in the order of their dramatic importance—the leading parts first, and so on down. Still another way is to give the names in the order of their social position. This is frequently done if the characters have titles. Sometimes, it is because the cast represents a large household, and the head of the family is given first, with the other members in the

order of their age and relationship to the head, though the more important members of the cast, dramatically speaking, may be those lower down the list. In a case of this kind, it is a good method, because it straightens out the various positions of the household without undue confusion. All these ways have their uses, and are correct. You may take your choice.

Synopsis. If there is room on this page, under the cast of characters, give act and scene synopsis, with time and place of each. If the cast is long and the space underneath small, give this synopsis space by itself on the next page. Thus:

ACT ONE

TIME: AUGUST OF THE PRESENT YEAR.
PLACE: GARDEN OF BEAUMONT'S HOUSE.

and so on. If all the acts occur in the same place, the list of acts need only state the occasion or time of each, and this can be preceded or followed by something like this:

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN THE GARDEN OF BEAUMONT'S HOUSE; THE TIME IS THE PRESENT.

The preceding will suggest the form to use for your particular play.

Beginning of each act. You start your play proper with the next page, which it is usual to num-

ber 1. Begin each act with a description of the stage-setting, or "set," unless it is the same as an earlier act. This is the place to mention the presence on the stage of any "props" which are to be used or mentioned by any characters: the letter Mary finds on her desk must be cited as well as the desk itself; John's pistol in the drawer of the chiffonier is listed as well as the chiffonier in which the property-man places it. Refer back to the chapter on the scenario in which I spoke of the danger of too great detail in the novice's scenic descriptions. It is hoped by the time you are ready to type your play for managerial approval you will be equal to a little greater detail. But if you are at all uncertain, you may mention the pistol, for instance, in some such manner as this: "The scene is John's bedroom. It is bare and ugly, with no furniture save his cheap iron bed, some chairs, a small table, and a rickety chiffonier. In the second drawer of this last is a loaded pistol." You will note you have described a room sufficiently suggestive to any manager, without having betrayed your ignorance as to just what terms to use in giving the position of the various articles of furniture.

Describe each character. Whether one character or several is on the stage at the rise of the curtain, the name of each, with a description of him, will find place in the paragraph following the description of the set. Incidentally, whenever you mention a group of characters as entering or leaving in a body—exclusive, of course, of the "extras"

—mention just which characters these are, unless it is a general exit or entrance of *all* the characters. But, in the matter of one character or several present on the stage at the rise, since it is their first appearance, this is the place for a description, and not as they begin to speak. Throughout the play-manuscript, give such a description of each character with his or her first entrance. Thus: "Enter John Lancaster. He is tall and thin, and speaks with a marked English accent." This is for the benefit of the stage-director, the actor playing the part, and the manager engaging him. Give his probable age, certain noticeable traits, his appearance, in a general way, as to figure and dress. You read of this in the chapter on the characters; this is the place you put it into use.

Manner of typing. In typing the play be clear as to what is spoken and what is acted. Your dialogue and business must be kept separate and distinct. As an example, I will present a few lines of supposed manuscript:

The room is in darkness.

Enter Lady Mary from door right with a lighted candle. She advances center and places it on the table.

LADY MARY

Placing her hand on her breast.

How very still it is!

She pauses as if listening.

Who's there? Answer at once, or

She takes the pistol from the table and

points it toward the corner where Raoul is hiding.
I shall shoot!

RAOUL
Stepping forward
It is I!

This shows how carefully we divide speech from action, even in the midst of a sentence. The "business" is also frequently inclosed in parentheses. There is no chance for a mistake. It is easy to read, to follow. The stage-director has no difficulty in finding his place.

All that is not actually spoken by a character is indented, as you see, and is usually underlined with red ink, though some manuscripts omit this red-lining. But, since it further serves to separate speech and action, many prefer it.

The spacing is a matter of choice. Sometimes, double spacing is used throughout between all lines. The usual method, however, is that given above—triple spacing between all speeches, with single spacing for the lines and business of the speeches.

You will note I have placed the name of the character speaking, in the center above the speech. This is the usual procedure in a play-manuscript, though there have been occasional exceptions among certain of the professional typists. In some of the published play-books, it is frequently placed at the left, preceding the speech, though of late years in the plays of successful dramatists published after

production it is given just as in the manuscript. Note *As a Man Thinks*, by Augustus Thomas. If the name is put at the left instead of center in a manuscript, it is nevertheless separated from the speech. Thus:

LADY MARY (Placing her hand on her breast)
How very still it is
(Pausing as if listening)
Who's there, etc.

This manner is not so good as the other, but it is used, and is clear.

Never, in a manuscript intended for business, for theatrical production, alter the name of the character at the head of his speeches. Whatever you call him with his first speech, he should be labeled throughout. It is customary, in this connection, to use for this purpose the name by which the character is most frequently called during the progress of the play, or by his simplest designation. For instance, he may be listed in the cast of characters as John Chesterton Banks, or Henry VIII, King of England. But if the former is called "Jack" by the majority of the cast, he heads his lines as "Jack." And the august potentate would head his speeches as Henry, or as The King. Keep it consistently to the end. A play meant for acting purposes once started two of its characters off as HE and SHE. Midway, these designations were changed to MAN-VICTIM and WOMAN-VICTIM. If you will remember that your audience is listening and watching, not reading, you

will realize the futility of changes like these in the parts of the manuscript not meant for them.

Estimating the acting time. As a rule, readers estimate the acting time of a play at the rate of a minute to a page—when pages are of the usual size and typed about as I have shown. For this reason it is well to number your pages, beginning afresh with each act. The director can then judge about how many minutes each act will run. A play is expected to provide an evening's entertainment: that is, it must last from one and three-quarters to two hours at least. Allowing for ten-minute waits between the acts—though this is longer than is often desirable—a play totaling one hundred pages will risk being too short. If a short play is very clever, this brevity is made up by stealing time elsewhere: beginning late, with long intermissions. It is a risk, however, as the waits are apt to tire an audience. In counting up the playing time, always allow for at least five-minute waits between acts. The average play-manuscript contains about one hundred and ten to one hundred and fifty pages.

The title. Since your play's title may be the last thing upon which you decide, it will find place here for discussion, as you finish the typing. No matter what your selection may be, it is likely to be changed several times before production, for any number of reasons. It is a point upon which everyone connected with the play's presentation will feel at liberty to talk. At the last analysis, it will be the manager's selection which prevails. You see, that title must

appear on billboards and other mediums of advertisement, so it is very important; it is almost a superstition with some managers. The title alone kept many women away from the performances of *To-day*, because of its implication in connection with its story. A woman who puts her love for fine clothes above her honor probably is true to life; but by the title we are given to understand that it is typical of American homes. Naturally, the women resented what they considered an insult to American womanhood; this was especially true among club-women, though the play had a financial success among the unthinking public which enjoyed the play as drama and ignored the title's attack. Therefore, for your part, in preparing your manuscript for its travels to managers' offices, remember these facts: the title must not be misleading; it must not tell too much of the story; it must be attractive. Above all, it must not be commonplace.

So much for the general appearance of the manuscript—a quite necessary part of your play's probable acceptance. As in writing it, you had to remember your medium, the actor, so in disposing of it, you must remember your manager. He must be hard up for a good play, or you must have a very big "pull" to make him delve for nuggets. I have seen the manuscript of a really good play so interlined and corrected that it was exceedingly difficult to read. Yet the writer was so shortsighted as to send it to readers and managers in just that shape.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AFTERMATH

WHEN IT IS FINISHED—THE LENGTH—WHAT TO DO NEXT—WHAT NOT TO DO—LENGTHENING A SHORT PLAY—SHORTENING A LONG PLAY—REVISION—PRACTICE—"NIGGLING"—DIFFICULTIES

When it is finished. The length. You have typed your play, and it is ready—for what? If it is your first play, it is ready to be pulled to pieces and written over again. The typing of it has done several things for you. It has shown you primarily just how much material you have. If you have a four-act play and have typed a manuscript of only sixty-five pages, this fact alone has shown you that your play, as written, is too short. If you find yourself with close to two hundred pages, your play stands in need of curtailment. Incidentally, cutting out is easier than lengthening, for some excellent reasons which will be mentioned in due season. A clear-typed manuscript, however bad its matter, has crystallized your thought for you clean of all obstructions of bad arrangement, correction, and interlining.

What to do next. The next move may bring you to one of two courses—or you may take both. If you are yourself conscious of defects in any part

of the work, and yet are not sure of just where they lie, do with the finished manuscript what you were advised to do with the scenario—put it aside and as nearly as possible forget it—for a week, or a month, or longer. Go at something else, especially if you have been writing on the play steadily. Then take out your manuscript, which you will at least find easy to read, and in many instances the defects will not have to be pointed out to you. But you may have difficulty in knowing just how to rectify them. It is then you will want the help and guidance of someone who "knows the game." Or, in the weeks when you have been "forgetting" your play, you may have turned it over to some friend or critic on whose opinion and its honest expression you can rely.

What not to do. I told you in the chapter on technique what *not* to do at this stage, and why. It will be a sore temptation to take your "firstling" where it will be praised and its writer lauded by kind but indiscriminating friends. If you are in earnest, it is the truth you want, however unpleasant, even brutal, it may be. It will be kinder in the end.

Your spirit at this juncture will show your real mettle. Even when a play has been produced, one's admiring friends are neither the best nor safest judges. Therefore, if you rush your first-born into production by some amateur dramatic club—as some authors do—be resolved with grim determination to look at that play as a stranger; not that you can—not that such a performance will really convince you

of its faults—it requires experience to see them. It was tried in New York in the now famous lawsuit when a successful play was produced in the morning, and the play from which the author claimed the first had been stolen was given in the afternoon. So supremely funny was the result that the people in the audience who really were sincerely sorry for the author, and for his sake tried hard to spare his sensibilities by not laughing, finally succumbed, helpless before a situation that even their kindly feeling could not meet seriously. They need not have worried. The author was neither hurt nor ashamed; he was very angry, yet saw nothing wrong with his play. Though faults and mistakes in construction, which made seasoned playgoers rock in helpless mirth, were shown him in pitiless relief, he saw only injustice and an incomprehensible lack of appreciation of the masterpiece he had written.

But, under kindlier circumstances, many plays by novices see the footlights in the author's home-town, presented by "local talent"—all amateurs. Everyone in the audience is puffed up with that very excellent thing, civic pride, pleased with knowing the author, interested personally, intimately, in the actors. Even the newspapers are kind to amateur theatricals, especially if the object for which they are given is charity. But this cannot rank as expert opinion. A play came to my notice some years ago, which had received much praise under just these circumstances. Positive that his dramatic success was assured, the proud author rushed his play out

into the hands of "professionals." I believe as yet he is thoroughly convinced of but one thing: the dramatic world does not know a good play when it sees it. Had not a large audience in Blankville turned out in force to see and praise their townsman's masterpiece?

Lengthening a short play. I referred some little way back to "padding" a play. The tendency to use it is what makes lengthening a play so difficult. If your play has no other fault than this—its shortness—remember one thing. I have said it before, but it must be driven home. Even though you are conscious that your intention is the padding out of the play to increase its length, whatever you add must be pertinent and in every way conformable with your idea.

In this process of lengthening, wherever possible add the extra speeches and scenes to the more important characters. In fact, if you are lengthening your play with due regard for the singleness of its story, this is where the lengthening would naturally fall. That does not mean that no lines are to be added to the lesser characters; wherever it is a vital need of your story to add a line or scene, add it. But do not do as a certain writer did—add a little something to every person in the drama. In the particular instance, this was done so consistently that a very unimportant character was brought forward to a degree which developed him into a real pest. In a subsidiary capacity, he had his value; lengthened out of proportion to that

value, he clogged the action: he happened to be a comedy "bit" and it was easy to give him all the "gags" which entered the writer's head as funny.

This advice is especially pertinent if you have a star-part in mind. Wherever it is consistent with the plot, the leading part or parts should be the ones to be strengthened. The hint has its commercial value.

Shortening a long play. If your play's one fault is being too long, you are most fortunate. The task of toning down, paring off here and there, is much easier than the forced construction of new material. Furthermore, it will strengthen the matter left. You will be compelled to terseness and simplicity in spite of yourself. It is surprising how much *can* be cut out that you were sure was indispensable. Some writer—his name escapes me—has said that no speech should remain in a play unless the elimination of that speech would fog the story. It is a severe test, and one not always possible to follow literally. But, if your play is too long by twenty or thirty pages, try it.

So much for the lengthening or shortening, when your play is otherwise in fairly good shape. Re-writing, revision, may mean several things quite different from mere adding or cutting out. The work may take weeks—it may take years, especially on a first play. But you have this advantage: you are learning something with every re-writing. You will eliminate characters as well as speeches; shift localities, turn your original manuscript topsy-turvy.

Your last act may become your first; your least important character may become your best. You may start to write a farce, and find yourself with real drama. You may write a melodrama and find it advisable to turn it into a farce. All these things have been done, and the resulting plays found a market. That very successful farce, *Officer 666*, was at first a melodrama.

Revision. In your work of revision you will find the hardest moment is the one in which you start to pull your beloved manuscript to pieces. If you have not loved it, it is not worth pulling apart. So it will hurt—it always does. Never mind; the greatest have trod the same destructive path only to find it the way to salvation and knowledge. Write your play. *Write* it.

Practice. After this, practice, practice, and more practice, as you write and re-write. Read and compare the old with the new, the play of thirty years ago with that of to-day. For instance, when Tom Robertson wrote *Caste* it was considered ultra-modern, most realistic in every respect. Read it; then compare it with one of Pinero's latest, or any of the recently published plays.

A little while ago a play-manuscript reached the critic which showed plainly that the author had not seen many plays, had never read one, nor even seen one word on the subject of play-writing—which facts the author confessed to be true. Without being too harsh, the critic suggested that the embryo writer begin at the beginning, go to the theater, read plays,

study, et cetera—and then went into detail as to just where and why the manuscript was wrong. In a few *weeks* a letter was received saying that the author had made several of the suggested changes and had submitted it to a New York manager! Knowing how much you need to learn is a great help at this stage of your play-writing. Not knowing, or refusing to realize it, only delays the day of achievement. Sooner or later the writer mentioned will have to sit down and go back to the beginning of her task, if she ever means to write a play.

"Niggling." Let me add a word—a word which is not in the vernacular of the theater, but which is as apt and descriptive here as in its home-place, the studios: "Don't *niggle*." Many art-students can draw correctly, and the first sketches of an oil-painting, rough, unfinished, boldly blocked in, have yet striking and characteristic likeness to the posing model, strength and breadth of touch. It is the ability to finish these paintings without losing any of the original strength which separates tyro from artist. Some students have the unhappy faculty of spoiling their studies in this effort. Whether they ever can learn the brush-work is another story. But the instructor's frequent "Don't niggle" to the over-zealous, over-impatient pupil, who is continually smudging out and painting in until the result is a characterless mess, is my advice to you now. One way to overcome the tendency is to do what you did on first completing the scenario: take your nervous brain and nervous fingers off for a while.

Too many criticisms. One very prolific cause of the tendency to "fuss" is the listening to too many critics, and trying to conform to their suggestions. It cannot be done without hurting your own work. Learn to weigh and reject. Take suggestion only when you can absorb it, make it a part of yourself. When you are convinced that your critic is right and you are wrong, make the changes. When you are convinced that the place your critic points out as weak *is* weak, strengthen that place, but not according to your critic's remedy unless that also carries conviction. Do not act upon any suggestion until you see it as the right thing to do, even though your critic is right and you are wrong. The result—and the consequences—will at least be your own. To make a change that you neither see nor understand can result only in stiffness. If you are wrong, you will understand in time, else you will never be a playwright.

Difficulties. To sum it up: You must find the middle ground between the haphazard dialogue and happenings of the novice in play-writing and the too manifest occurrences of the over-exact, carefully technical, though inexperienced, dramatist. Only many writings and re-writings can bring you to that happy place. Few first plays ever see the light of the stage. Sometimes the original story gets to the theater, but its form has usually undergone many changes, until it is practically no longer the same play.

It took almost four or five complete re-writings

of a certain play in three years before that play had a public presentation. The story had remained intact, some of the characters held their places, and an occasional bit of dialogue was still apt; but there all resemblance to the original play ended. The first draft was in four acts, had three different settings, and contained sixteen characters. The present play has three acts, one setting, and only eight characters. So it can hardly be called a "first play" any longer. Yet, in this case, the writer had had years of experience on the stage and with the pen.

You will perhaps argue that I am making this matter of play-writing seem unnecessarily difficult. It is difficult, and the more respect with which you approach the art, the less apt you are to tumble into the pitfalls awaiting the careless, cocksure novice.

CHAPTER XX

SOME PHASES OF PLAY-WRITING

COLLABORATION — DRAMATIZATION — ADAPTATION — TRANSLATION

Collaboration. Collaboration is an excellent thing for the novice in play-writing. If you have a good idea which you can work out with someone who knows more of the theater than you do, you will stand a chance of getting your story into a fairly presentable shape, besides learning much in the process of writing.

The methods by which two or more people may work together on a play vary with the circumstances and the temperament of the individuals. Sometimes one may furnish the idea or the story, and the other will work that story into the play-form. Still, if you wish to learn something of play-writing, that will not be of much help as instruction, however much it may make your idea a salable one. You may gain some knowledge even in this way through seeing your plan in its new arrangement, if you study it carefully.

Best, if it can be arranged, to collaborate with someone with whom you can work actively, talking over, arguing points, planning scenes and dialogues —watching the work as it grows. It will help you

greatly, and the necessity of proving certain points to you will not hurt your collaborator.

The financial arrangements in the case of collaboration rest with the co-authors. The authors' share of the receipts, if the play reaches production, is usually divided equally between them. Copyright is taken out in both names, and each is half-owner. If the division should be one-third to two-thirds, instead of " 50-50," it is because, by mutual agreement, the authors have decided that one deserves the difference because of additional creation and composition in the writing. The arrangements are really personal between the writers, and the matter is only mentioned here because of some indefiniteness in the minds of certain of the laity as to just what collaboration entails.

Dramatization. In " dramatization "—the turning of novels and stories into plays for the theater —we have a sometimes popular though not always successful phase of play-writing. Personally—and remember this is only a personal opinion—I never knew a popular novel that was not better than the play made from it, or a dramatization that was not dependent to some extent on people's knowledge of the novel. There have been many financial successes among these dramatizations, though even with these successes opinions have differed as to the artistic result. The chief reason is that, no matter how clever a play has been made from the original story, it is impossible to get all of it into the scope of the theater. Someone is sure to find some favorite

bit omitted; this caviler will always report: "It is very disappointing—not half so good as the book!" In dramatizing a well-known novel you must either read the story until you have absorbed it in all its points, then write your play without further reference to the book for dialogue or character—or else you must follow the story exactly as to personalities and dialogue, being careful, however, to exclude everything that would keep the plot from being "single," the action from being continuous and related.

The former of these methods comes closer to adaptation of the novel than dramatization, and is possible only when the original story was slight, or mediocre, or little known to the public: Shakespeare's reconstruction of stories and old novels is a case in point. The second one is the only one really permissible in the dramatization of a popular and well-known novel—a "best-seller." For a dramatist to take liberties with the novelist's story beyond the point necessary for theatrical presentation is an offense to everyone who enjoyed reading the book. A well-known playwright had a very decided failure, dramatic and financial, when he tried it in *The Ne'er-Do-Well*, by Rex Beach. Unpardonable changes were made in the personality of sundry characters, and one very charming creation of the novelist's was omitted entirely, an omission which altered the entire story. These cogs taken out, or loosened, the result was dire. On the other hand, George Cohan succeeded where Charles Klein failed. *Seven Keys to*

Baldpate as a play left nothing to be desired, though materially different from the novel of the same name. Yet, even here, those who had read the story before seeing the play were divided in their opinions as to the improvement. But in both novel and play the spirit was farcical, so that the alteration was in material rather than in spirit.

Sometimes it is possible to dramatize a short story with some degree of success because of the compactness of this form of writing. At least, it is a good method for practice for the student of play-writing. Just as the writer of prose is advised to take a verse from one of the masterpieces of poetry to paraphrase it into prose, for the sake of learning how to couch a fine idea in adequate language with freedom of expression, so one may take an idea in a story and turn it into a play with the same ideal of practice in construction. Otherwise dramatization is work the novice had better let alone.

Translation. Another recognized phase of writing for the theater is the translation and adaptation of plays in other tongues. The work of merely translating, literally, the original play is comparatively simple. But much more than this is necessary. The author's speech may be all fire; the translation may contain the bare meaning of the speech with all the fire left out. The dramatic *intention* of the writer must pass from one language to the other. The fiery speech may be a climax; the translation, however exact, may be so tame as to completely drop that climax. This is where adaptation becomes nec-

essary. The translator need not be a dramatist; the adapter must be. For that reason two people are frequently responsible for the presentation of a foreign play in English, one acting in each of these capacities. But where translator and adapter are one, experience is necessary. Adaptation of dialogue from one language to another is an art requiring a native ability to write, together with a complete knowledge of both languages.

Adaptation. When the adapter goes further than merely making the language of the translator take on the same tempo and coloring of the original, he encounters many difficulties which he does not always override. For instance, to supposedly bring the play nearer to the comprehension of the audiences, scenes laid in France or Germany are lifted bodily to localities in England or the United States. Sometimes the result is successful; oftenest it is not. Situations which were normal in their original environment become freakish, incomprehensible, when transplanted. The atmosphere is destroyed, the play ruined. Transplanting may be a legitimate part of adaptation, and when really legitimate, is excusable. But frequently this transplanting has no real excuse, except, perhaps, the vanity of the adapter or the insular narrowness of the community demanding it.

A particularly striking example comes to mind. The original play was in Yiddish, laid among a certain class of immigrants in New York. Among these people, played by actors who knew the types they portrayed, the play had reason, strength, drama.

For some inexplicable reason, when the play was translated, it was adapted to American life in New York, the characters all American, the locality a fashionable uptown neighborhood. Immediately, everything was distorted, out of key. What had been correct, possible, became impossible, and most un-American. The story remained, but it was false to the conditions, and to the environment in which the characters moved.

It would seem that the conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that only such adaptation should be used as will make the translation as dramatic in one language as in its original. Great skill is necessary to change both language and nationality, The chief offender in this regard has been England. The Englishman prefers to see himself on the stage, therefore even American plays, except those of rural character, must be adapted to English life. Even Ibsen's plays have been shifted from Norway to England, and most of Sardou's were first played in English with English instead of French characters. Frequently great liberties were taken with the originals: a dramatization of Sardou's *Odette* not only shifted language and country, but entirely changed the finale.

This sin of changing an author's intention in a play produced far from its nativity is one unfortunately well known to the United States. Even though we are usually willing to witness a translation in which characters play their parts in the locality where the author put them, our managers

have a mistaken idea that in the matter of endings we must be treated gently. In some cases, the authors have themselves fallen in with this notion, and connived with the manager in writing a different ending for the States. This was the case in both *Israel* and *The New Sin*. But, as a very large number of Americans go abroad each year and see these plays in the original, the change is usually noted and often resented.

It is easy to see in all this that adaptation, like dramatization, is not work for the novice—except for his own private amusement and what practice he may find in it.

CHAPTER XXI

OTHER PHASES OF PLAY-WRITING

BLANK VERSE—HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL PLAYS—SYMBOLICAL AND ALLEGORICAL PLAYS—PLAYS FOR AMATEURS, SCHOOLS, ETC.

Blank verse. The matter of writing plays in blank verse comes up as a question. To the novice I would say emphatically, "Don't." If you *must* write your play in verse, publish it as a book if you can find a publisher; do not expect a sale or a big success for it as a play. For practical reasons, we can take the manager's point of view; since at present he controls the situation, his point of view is important. Versified drama, from the very nature of the subjects of which it treats, requires expensive settings, and frequently quite a number of them. Plays in verse, fine in subject and treatment, even when written by the masters of poetry, have not been such financial success as to encourage the attempt by a beginner of this difficult form of play-writing. One of the cleverest plays of this kind I ever read has never to my knowledge seen the footlights. The author had it published: I believe it had a sale; he also gave readings of it. But no manager has ever risked putting it on the stage.

Except for fairy pieces, or fantastic, symbolical,

or allegorical plays, blank verse is really antiquated. With a musical setting, as in grand opera, poetry has a legitimate place. But in the modern theater, written around human beings, the tendency is to reflect life as it ought to be, not as it never was nor ever will be. In the unusual, the supernatural, it seems a legitimate vehicle. With people, real people, of any time or place, it is neither natural nor true. When the stage ceased to be a platform, and receded within a complete border of lights, so that the audience looked on, as it were, at real human happenings, the demand grew, more and more, that those people should preserve the idea of life, by speaking and acting like ordinary mortals. Therefore, modern blank verse, in dealing with human affairs past or present, belongs in the class of the purely literary or "closet-drama." However beautiful, it is a false and unreal medium for this day and time.

One reason why verse is wrong in the present-day drama is that it is difficult to make it conform to one of the strictest laws of play-writing: nothing must be permitted to find place in the play which is not fully needed. In verse, the tendency is to follow some metaphor, or beautiful thought, through the by-ways of well-chosen words and rhythmical lines, frequently wandering far afield into long declamatory speeches which are both unnatural and infringing on the action. To keep verse strictly within the law which holds ordinary dialogue to pertinency requires something closely approaching

genius. Ibsen's opinion is of value at this point. Montrose J. Moses, in his work on Ibsen, says: "In a letter to the Norwegian actress, Lucie Wolf, sent from Rome on May 25, 1883, Ibsen delivered himself of his views. . . . So thoroughly had he been torn from his old moorings as to believe firmly that verse had done more injury than good to the drama; were he an actor he would refuse to utter a line of conventional rhythm, but as a dramatist, he could, and he would, persist in declining to perpetuate the form which he believed was fast growing obsolete."

When dealing with the fantastic or occult, verse does not seem so out of key. Yet even in successful dramas of this sort, there are many places where the poet has deliberately dropped verse and taken to prose, for the simple reason that certain characters or certain episodes demand unevenness, lack of rhythm and harmony. Think of the great poets who have failed as dramatists partly because they looked down on the theater and would not study it, partly because the people, that large public which goes to the theater, prefer to see themselves and their kind on the stage. With the possible exception of Browning, not one scored a real success; and even Browning's full success in this direction has been many times disputed. In *Tiger*, a one-act play by Witter Bynner, we have the nearest approach to an entirely natural blank verse for the stage I have known. The lines sound like prose, except for a certain hardly noticeable rhythm. And even the actors' speaking of these lines would cause them to

lose some of this rhythm. Acted, the play gives no impression of its versification. Therefore, excellent as it is, it might just as well have been prose. But Mr. Bynner's success is not to be achieved by everyone. And as I am writing solely for the student, the novice in play-writing, I can only repeat, "Don't."

Historical and Biblical plays. In the Historical Drama, among which may be included Biblical plays, we have a form of writing which may be dealt with by the dramatist in two ways. The first of these puts the composition immediately in the class where the usual rules of play-writing must be followed. That is, to take one particular episode in history or the Bible as the story or plot, and weave a drama with that one plot as its mainspring, using only such facts and characters from history as will help the presentation; the rest is the author's imagination. Such a play is *Madame Sans-Gêne*, later re-written as a comic opera, *The Duchess of Dantzig*, and finally turned into grand opera by Giordono, which takes up only that part of the life of Napoleon which touches his dealings with the Duchess.

The other method is much more complicated, because it has no vital plot or story, but takes its theme from the character whose life is being dramatized, or from a section of history covering many years. This method is most difficult, because it usually follows the original story more closely and makes necessary the decisions as to just what to discard and what to use: how to bring certain widely parted

events closer together without sacrificing too many of the facts as known: which real characters to use, which others to create, and so on. In method it is not unlike the dramatization of a novel when the effort is to follow the material closely. The chief difficulty is to find some one thread or idea, some motive beyond the presentation of a particular character, which will hold the play together. One of the most perfect specimens of how this may be done is Louis N. Parker's *Joseph and His Brethren,* in which the connecting motive is the love and jealousy of a woman whose acts are made the cause of all the evil which comes to Joseph. Several times the episode of Potiphar's wife has been made the subject of drama, with the play written solely around her love and its scorning: the events leading to it and away from it. But in Mr. Parker's play we see Joseph, from his receiving of the coat of many colors to the arrival of his father and brothers in Egypt: practically all of his career as related in Genesis. And the dramatist, to do this and still hold it together as drama, has skillfully extended the influence of Potiphar's wife back to the date of Joseph's rescue from the pit, and carried it forward to her effort to trick one of his brothers into killing him at the height of his success in Egypt.

This form of drama, like blank verse, is not to be lightly attempted by the student. It will save you many heart-aches if you let it alone until you know more about the theater and the play. You may wonder why I speak of any of these difficult and obscure

forms at all. Because, all too frequently, it is these very forms which most attract the student, especially the student who wishes to soar high. Yet all of them belong to the kind of work requiring an expert. Start at the beginning: you must, if you mean to get anywhere.

Symbolical and allegorical plays. Another class of plays difficult to describe because it belongs to the realm of the imaginary and depends almost entirely on inspiration, and difficult to write because it must conform to the rules of the theater while seeming to transgress all of them, is that comprising the symbolical and allegorical plays. Many of these have had their measure of success lately: *The Blue Bird*, *Chantecler*, *Everywoman*, and more recently *The Good Little Devil*, *The Poor Little Rich Girl*, and *Experience*. Since most of these are published in book-form, they are at hand to be studied.

However, a word or two may be said in regard to symbolism. There should be no blurring. Metaphorical images and symbols should be unmistakable in meaning and intention, in application and position. Your audience must grasp your idea unfailingly, not just happen on it. Therefore, all your symbolism should be of a kind to be understood and not too remote or too occult. Remember, you are not yet a Maeterlinck! It must be simple and single, not complicated. If you are personifying fire, which is a concrete thing, or pride, which is abstract, the personifications must take on only the attributes applicable to the especial thing you are typifying.

I remember in a very charming little allegory read some time ago, Conscience and Truth were personified. Conscience guided Truth, and Truth was silenced by Wrong. The treatment and interpretation were both confusing and incorrect. As generally understood, Truth is absolute, and guides Conscience, not the other way around. Wrong can silence Conscience, but Truth eternally *is*, and may be ignored, but not affected. Do you see my meaning? In personifying, you must give your characters the *absolute* meaning of the terms symbolized. Do not mix your symbols; it is much worse than a mixed metaphor, and far more confusing.

Plays for amateurs. With plays intended only for the use of amateurs, written for some specific occasion, or to be used in schools and clubs, there is more laxity in construction; not because the rules of construction are any less a fact, but because the medium is less hampered by these rules and the audience less critical under the circumstances. Nevertheless, there are numbers of writers who have mastered enough of the laws governing play-writing to be able to dispose of such plays—masques, pageants, "entertainments"—to publishers who make a business of catering to amateurs, or to magazines which like to print an occasional play of the kind for the use of children, and others.

As the different educational theaters grow and spread, more and more material of this kind will be demanded, and rules will become more exacting

as the field grows wider. Therefore, whether you are writing a play for some company of Boy Scouts, or for some great star of the theatrical firmament, you will do well to be as critical of your own work in one case as in the other, however different the material may be. You have no more right to offend the intelligence of an indulgent audience than that of one more exacting.

As a usual thing, plays for purposes of entertainment are published. Therefore, in addition to the rules governing the telling of your story there are several which will help the sale of your material, because making it more widely available. If the play has a purpose beyond that of mere amusement—as in the case of plays written for particular occasions or for instruction—a preface generally states a few facts, explanatory to the teacher or other person who may take charge of affairs. Such prefaces not only contain the description of scenery and costume, but also hints as to economical makeshifts for these. Instructions should be clear, and as easy to follow as possible. Though the play may be printed, keep in mind all that the dramatist is cautioned to remember: it is to be acted by people, whether children or adults, and must be capable of such rendition. The same laws governing the difference between business and dialogue as spoken of in earlier chapters are to be observed. You cannot bridge a gap by a descriptive paragraph meant only for the reader any more in these plays than in the bigger play for the real theater. All descriptions

are meant for potential performers and their directors. You are to ignore the fact of a *reading* public. Only thus will you keep within bounds, and achieve a play which will at least be consistent and capable of being understood when acted.

CHAPTER XXII

ONE-ACT PLAYS

CURTAIN-RAISERS—VAUDEVILLE—DRAMATIC SKETCHES—COMEDY AND FARCICAL SKETCHES—"SLAPSTICK" SKETCHES—SCENIC OR FEATURE SKETCHES—MUSICAL SKETCHES—THE "CURTAIN"—AMATEUR THEATRICALS

Up to this time, we have been dealing with the long play in its various phases. We can now take up the shorter or one-act play, which will run, in acting time, anywhere from fifteen minutes to an hour, according to the subject.

As used in the theater of to-day, we might roughly divide such plays into curtain-raisers, vaudeville sketches, and a third class suitable for amateur theatricals.

Curtain-raisers. At the present writing there is but little use for the first of these, although if such a playlet is sufficiently unusual or powerful, it may be used to eke out an evening's performance. Yet, in a whole New York season there may be not one on the stage. It is only very occasionally one sees a *Carrots*, an *'Op-o'-Me-Thumb*, or a *Twelve-Pound Look* as a part of the performance in a legitimate theater, except on some large benefit programme. The one-time curtain-raiser has been pressed into serv-

ice by the up-to-date manager of vaudeville, and we therefore find ourselves taking up that class of one-act plays as the most important of the three. The success of a theater in New York which deals only with one-act plays should do much to raise the caliber of the one-act drama. It presents a wide field for good writers, and the demand in consequence may grow. In any case, the one-act play is excellent practice for the beginner in dramatic writing, in addition to its presenting a form worthy of our best playwrights. It is popular in Germany, France, Spain, and some of the foremost dramatists of those countries have given it of their best. Many one-act plays are gems: witness those of Lady Gregory, J. M. Barrie, and others. Since the form usually deals with but one episode and few characters, it makes for conciseness in treatment and demands clearness in exposition. These facts alone show its value as practice for the novice, who is too prone to spread unimportant matters over quantities of paper. In this connection, read the chapter on the one-act play in Clayton Hamilton's *Studies in Stagecraft.*

Vaudeville. The vaudeville sketch as it is to-day can be subdivided into the dramatic, the comedy, the scenic or feature sketch, and the " slap-stick " or specialty sketch. There are various shades and kinds of these which we will try to take up, and the lines of division are not always strongly drawn.

Dramatic sketches. The first, the dramatic sketch, is the same order of play in subject and

treatment as the usual curtain-raiser. And yet, since written for vaudeville, as part of a bill which includes everything from circus acts to grand-opera sopranos, it will be played before a mixed audience of varied tastes, and must have that dreadful thing which managers call a "punch." No one can exactly define this strange ingredient, and the demand for it has often killed good work. The dramatic sketch is frequently used by some well-known actor or actress taking a "flyer" in vaudeville in an off-season, and the actor's name rather than the sketch may be the real drawing-card. But, as a general rule, the sketch must contain something unusual, or some opportunities for excellent acting. A dramatic sketch which is tragic or pathetic must make up for what is really a vaudeville defect by being out of the ordinary in every point—story, writing, acting; the sketch which is too serious, as a rule, is not popular with vaudeville managers, or with many audiences. As vaudeville stands just now, unfortunately, it is the manager who must be pleased, not the audience; knowing this, he rejoices in being exceedingly arbitrary. An anecdote is told around the offices on Broadway, which may or may not be true, but which illustrates the usual attitude of the average vaudeville manager—fortunately for good work, there are most hopeful exceptions: A certain actor, arguing with one of these czars about the qualities of his play which had just had its "try-out" performance before an audience, said: "But they laughed heartily!" The answer he received

was: "What the —— do I care! You gotta make *me* laugh!"

The one-act play intended for vaudeville never runs longer than half an hour, and that only in the musical and scenic sketches. Consequently, since brevity is a desideratum, compression is necessary. Your play must begin at once, get to its climax quickly, and terminate just at the right moment, with the threads properly straightened out, or with such straightening clearly suggested. Therefore, do not try to put into this form a story requiring psychological development or growth. It should be distinctly of one episode, and with as few characters as are possible to tell the story. George Arliss said in an interview in regard to the vaudeville sketch: "I say that it doesn't permit the finer effects because it doesn't give time enough. You require more leisure to establish an atmosphere than the allotted twenty minutes permits."

"Slap-stick." We can dismiss the "slap-stick" sketch in a few words. It is very thin as to story, being usually more than half written by the players themselves, depending chiefly on novelty, or fun, or real "horse-play" for its success. It is amended or changed according to the way this part or that happens to "go" at a performance.

Comedy and farce. The comedy sketch is more apt to be farce than straight comedy. If a farce, it plays preferably about twenty minutes, and the more rapid the movement the better. Here, as in the longer play, the fewer characters with which you

tell your story, the more chance you have of disposing of your sketch. If it has but two people and will play fast and furiously for twenty or twenty-two minutes, there is a market. Every character over that adds to the cost of presentation, and will be considered by the would-be purchaser. Still, as in the longer play, if you have a good idea, use the characters you need. The writing of the one-act play is good practice, even if you find no immediate market. And many an interesting playlet finds at least an audience at some club, or benefit, or church entertainment, and you can judge something of the effect of your work.

If your playlet demands special scenery, costuming, a large cast, and other extras, it stands almost no chance of a sale, unless its originality and novelty are so unusual as to attract some vaudeville manager who happens to be looking for just that sort of thing. Every one of these matters adds to the expense; if to the cost of production you add railroad fares, express charges, tips to stage-hands, to say nothing of the demands of the stage-carpenters' union, you will readily understand an actor's hesitation in assuming such risks. The ideal sketch for vaudeville has two, three, or four characters, demands no "props" or scenery to be carried from theater to theater (as the required properties and setting are of a kind to be found in every theater property-room), and calls for no special service from the stage-hands, such as telephone-bells, outside noises, et cetera. If the story is good and gives the

actors any opportunities in addition to the preceding conditions, your market is waiting. Mind, the foregoing is an ideal: it is rarely realized. Yet Hall McAllister, in *Quits*, which has been played by Wilton Lackaye, has written a dramatic sketch which goes beyond this ideal by only a narrow margin: it has three characters, and its only necessary properties are a sofa large enough to conceal one of the characters, and an ornamental stand of arms for the wall. Everything else, furnishings, scenery, pictures, are the ordinary fixtures of any well-equipped theater—and even the sofa and arms are possible assets of a property-room.

Scenic or feature sketch. The scenic or feature sketch has also its sub-divisions: the poetic or allegorical, the fairy spectacle, and the musical. These are always expensive, yet many vaudeville managers like an occasional "act" of the kind on a bill. The musical acts may range all the way from a one-act comic- or even grand-opera, to an act with the story so slim that it just holds together the songs and dances which are its main features.

The "curtain." The best way to judge of this market is to see an occasional vaudeville performance. There is one thing on which all old-timers in this line insist: whatever the sketch, the curtain scene or speech, the finale, must call forth the biggest laugh, or excite the strongest thrill of the act. This does not always mean that the curtain must fall at the play's climax, any more than that it should do so in a long play. But the lines, or

the situation, or the "picture" at the moment of the curtain's fall must be good. Many a poor sketch holds its place because of this "punch" at the finish; many a good sketch falls down because the ending, however good dramatically, fails of being what vaudevillians call "a great curtain." It cannot be described, because the thing needful for this punch varies with every playlet. One man has an excellent little play, but cannot get it on the booking of the "big time" (the first-class houses in large cities) because he has not yet found a satisfactory curtain: he has tried for several seasons to think out something unusual or "snappy." In the meantime, he plays it on the "small time."

Yet, as usual, there is the occasional exception, showing that in this as in everything else in playwriting, there is no set rule. A well-known and successful vaudeville star tells of a dramatic sketch in which he and his wife played. He tried eleven different "surprise" endings without success. Then, as a last resort, he took the simply logical finale with an utterly bromide line for his curtain speech, and the sketch played to his utmost satisfaction for more than two years.

Amateur theatricals. In the playlet for amateur theatricals, all that has been said on this subject in the previous chapter is pertinent. It has a market with publishers who make a business of that sort of play. One word of advice in regard to all plays intended for amateurs is timely just here. The less *acting* required, the better.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COMMERCIAL ASPECT

LEASING THE PLAY—REACHING THE MANAGER—RULES OF SOME MANAGERS — LAWSUITS — UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS — PLAY-BROKERS — "STAR" PARTS —THE PERSONAL EQUATION—THE WESTERN MARKET—ROYALTIES—THE CONTRACT—MOVING-PICTURE RIGHTS—STOCK RIGHTS—AUTHOR'S NAME — CONTRACTS FOR VAUDEVILLE SKETCHES — AGENT'S FEES—COPYRIGHT—PLAY-PIRACY

Leasing the play. With your play written—or re-written—and finished to your liking, your next step of course is to get it to its proper place, the theater. The aim is to lease it to some reputable manager, receiving a bonus as advance royalty, and a percentage of the receipts of the box-office. This percentage varies with the playwright's reputation and the manager's pocketbook.

It is never advisable to sell a play outright. The only excuse for doing so is an urgent need of ready money. Plays have been sold in this way for small sums and have never after seen the light. You may ask why they were bought at all. Perhaps the manager saw a possibility, and $200 was a small sum to pay for the entire ownership of that possibility; then, bigger things coming up, the whole matter was

pigeon-holed. I do not know the reason: I only know it has happened.

Reaching the manager. To get to the manager is another matter. If you can reach him personally or by letter so much to your advantage. In the latter case it is just as well to tell him that your play is of such and such a nature, outlining very briefly the theme, and that there are so many characters, acts, and changes of scenery. I have spoken in other chapters of the effect the number of these may have on the leasing of your play. If he is interested, you may be asked to send the manuscript, or to submit a scenario. This scenario, written from your completed play, should be as short as is consistent with a clear outline of the story. Do not send a scenario to a manager unless asked. And even then, experienced playwrights much prefer to submit the entire play. Let me quote the remarks of a play-reader employed by a well-known firm, who recently gave his views to the New York Sunday *Times:* "Professional dramatists will say, almost without exception, that an author is unwise to submit his work in scenario form. If a scenario is properly made (and that is a rare thing) it still offers a most inadequate idea of what the completed play will be. It provides a vague idea of the material employed, and something more definite about the construction, but practically nothing of the treatment of the piece—that is, nothing to supply the tone of the work, the dialogue or action of the moment, which, inasmuch as the audience is an eye-

witness, is the most imperative thing in the drama. . . . I have never received a scenario from an established dramatist."

Rules of some managers. Unsolicited MSS. As a general rule it is not a good plan to send a play-manuscript to a manager through any common carrier without his knowledge or desire. Offices are deluged with play-manuscripts of all degrees of badness. Some may be read, if at a glance they look promising; others never are. At least two New York managers recently refused absolutely to read unsolicited material: one of these warned all senders of such manuscripts that the plays would be dropped unread into the waste-paper basket; the other announced a reading fee of two dollars from all such writers, which sum he facetiously proclaimed would be put toward a fund for protection in lawsuits. Such rulings the unknown playwright has brought on himself. Manuscripts forced on the manager against his will and without his desire have frequently been the cause of unnecessary and ridiculous lawsuits. A play is produced and achieves success. Immediately every writer who has submitted a play to that particular manager finds in the success certain resemblances to his own play and promptly sues for theft of his material. In most cases the suit is a difficult one for the writer, because he must prove that the manager really has seen his manuscript. If it happens to be one which was sent in without suggestion of the manager, the latter can very properly claim that he never saw it, did not even know

such a MS. was in his office. This does not mean that plots from plays by unknown writers have not been filched by the unscrupulous. Unfortunately, such things have happened, and will happen. All the more reason for the playwright to protect himself by sending his manuscript where he can follow its progress, or know definitely of its receipt.

Lawsuits. Should you send your manuscript, unsolicited, and find some time later a play produced by the recipient of your effort, make sure any resemblances are actual before rushing into a lawsuit. Remember that original episodes and incidents are extremely rare in real life. One writer has, I think, said that, all told, there are only some twenty-odd plots in the world. That may or may not be true, but it only shows how very likely it is that several different minds might be thinking along the same lines. You must prove that the material was taken from yours, and to do that the resemblance must be striking. Only recently a manager who had been continually harried with such suits decided to show up an author who had brought suit regarding theft of plot, et cetera, by producing both plays, properly cast and acted. The result was one of the biggest jokes in the history of the New York stage. Actually, the only resemblance between the two plays was that both were given by actors, on a stage, and, I believe, two of the characters had the same Christian name! It would have been well had either the unfortunate author or his lawyer known more about both plays.

Play-brokers. Therefore, if you cannot reach the manager in person, by letter, or through some mutual acquaintance, the next best way is to take or send your play to a play agent. There are several of excellent reputation. Naturally they will only handle plays for which they feel there is a market; therefore, they give the manager a reasonable assurance that the play presented will not be entirely impossible, and he, or his play-reader, is apt to look it over. "Looking it over" is no figure of speech; that is all the attention many plays receive. Which emphasizes all I have said in other chapters about the attractive and workmanlike appearance of the manuscript.

"Star" parts. If the play contains a big part suitable to some particular actor or actress, you may find the players more approachable than the manager. Though, unless he or she is a star with a share in the business side of the enterprise, the last word lies with the manager.

Books and plays. This matter of placing your play is one of the most trying and heart-breaking of the newcomer's troubles. We are told that Clyde Fitch carried one of his plays around for two years before it was produced; and *The Climbers* was refused by nearly every manager in the metropolis before Miss Amelia Bingham accepted it, with profit both to herself and the author. It is harder to have a play produced than to have a book published. The reason is a matter of simple arithmetic. To begin with, the manager's initial expenses may run

into five and sometimes six figures, whereas a publisher's preliminary expenses may be easily covered by from five to seven hundred dollars. Then, there is a tremendous difference in the output. In one year in the United States, the number of published books will amount to more than twelve thousand. In one year in New York, the chief producing center of the country, the number of plays produced will be less than one hundred and fifty. Add to this the possible one hundred new plays which may be produced in other American cities, never reaching New York (and one hundred is a generous margin), there would be, all told, about two hundred and fifty plays produced in a year in the United States. With these numbers confronting you it is easy to see why a publisher is likely to read everything which does not give evidence at once of being either illiterate or contrary to the policy of the house, where a manager, knowing he can produce only so many plays a year, is not compelled to read anything unless it shows easily that the writer has some knowledge of the theater. In this connection, you might find *The True Adventures of a Play*, by Louis Evans Shipman, instructive reading, since it shows some of the difficulties encountered by a professional MS. which seems to have been liked by all who read it, but which nevertheless met the usual number of delays and arguments. Also, if you can get it, read *Breaking into the Playhouse* in the *Saturday Evening Post* for February 21, 1914.

The personal equation. I have not mentioned one

other difficulty which confronts the dramatist in his efforts to dispose of his play, because that difficulty is one which is faced by anyone desirous of marketing any kind of writing: the personal equation. Some managers maintain a play-reader. The reading of many plays is difficult in the extreme. Once in a while, after a welter of impossible concoctions, the reader comes across something which is readable, or so he thinks. But it is often only because all the others have been so hopelessly bad that by very force of contrast this one seems good. This may explain why so many prize-winning compositions are rarely what prize-winners should be—the best of their kind. Also, in the personal equation come the individual prejudices of the reader. An excellent play was once turned down by a reader because, as she told the author, she was of such and such a religious faith and it would be against her principles to recommend such a play for presentation to the public, in spite of its dramatic excellences.

A manager or reader will refuse a play because he himself cannot see a certain phase or argument or situation as possible, and lacks the larger vision to take in the other fellow's point of view. But, as I said, in all branches of art where it strikes the world of competition in the market-place these personal opinions either stand in the way or are the means of speedy acceptance. So the dramatist is not alone in facing the situation, and if his play is good, someone there will be who will see his premises and produce it.

The Western market. Just a word at this point to writers far from Broadway. Remember that New York is not the only producing center in the United States. Many a play has reached the metropolis by way of Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, or some other large city where the theater is popular. Also, plays have been " tried out " in some good stock company where an opportunity was given to producing managers to see it. Do not neglect the opportunities near home to rush your manuscript several thousand miles away.

Royalties. With the actual money side there are several arrangements possible or usual. I have spoken of royalties. These are a certain percentage of the weekly receipts while a play is running at any theater or theaters. The royalty arrangement is the only one a dramatist should consider with regard to a long play. I will deal with the vaudeville arrangement later.

Royalties are computed on the *gross* weekly receipts during the play's run. The author signs a contract with the producer in which the latter agrees to pay anywhere from 2½ per cent. to 10 per cent. of these receipts. Never sign a contract computing the royalties on the *net* receipts. Frequently the royalties are arranged on a sliding scale: such a percentage up to a certain sum, such a percentage up to a certain amount over that, and so on. It is only in this sliding-scale arrangement that as low a royalty as 2½ per cent. should be considered. It is a royalty never offered to the experienced dramatist

in any case. A very frequent arrangement is 5 per cent. on all up to five thousand dollars, and 10 per cent. on all over that. As has been said, these arrangements vary with the reputation of the writer and the standing of the manager. Of course, your ideal is to reach the best known of these. But it is not always possible. Frequently plays not quite pleasing, for one reason or another, to the big manager, will find production through some "star" appearing only "on the road." This arrangement may not be of any particular service in helping you to reach Broadway, but it will be of use to you in the encouragement to try again and aim higher.

The contract. There are several things to remember, and a few to avoid. I will try to touch on them as briefly as possible. Sometimes on a first play an author may waive the bonus or advance royalty. Though, if the play is good enough to be produced at all, there is no real reason why this should be done. A manager *always* should agree to produce the play before a certain date—sometimes as long as a twelvemonth away—or else forfeit his rights, and the bonus already paid the author. Also, the contract should stipulate that, if the manager fails to produce the play for a certain period each year (the smallest number is fifty performances) from the date of production, the agreement is at an end and the play reverts to the author. Royalties are contracted to be paid within at least ten days after they are due. These three points should never be omitted from a contract.

Rights. The author holds the copyright for his play, and should reserve the right of publication (in play-form), also the English and foreign dramatic rights. When desired these can be assigned to the manager in proper form. In the matter of the English rights, the manager can be given an option which must be exercised within one month after production. The contract should contain some such wording as the following: the play is leased "for territory hereinafter specifically described." The "territory" is usually specified as the United States and Canada. All rights not so mentioned belong to the author.

Moving-picture rights. The moving-picture rights in a play nowadays are always included in a contract. The producer agrees to pay the dramatist at least 33⅓ per cent., preferably and usually 50 per cent., and I understand the Authors' League maintains that 75 per cent. is the proper rate, of the royalty received from the moving-picture company. The idea back of this last percentage is that, unless the manager is himself the proprietor of the moving-picture company, he acts only as the agent who has leased the play. But at present the "50-50" arrangement is the most usual. The courts have held—though not settled—that the picture rights are separate from the dramatic rights. Certainly, in equity, the author should not divide the rights. If he retains them, he will agree not to lease the picture rights until a certain period after the play's production, usually two years. The picture rights should not be

leased until the play's run is ended, whether that run is one season or several. This seems only fair to the manager who has made the run possible.

Stock rights. In the matter of leasing stock rights to the manager, there is some difference of opinion. By "stock rights" is meant the leasing of a play for a half week, a week, or several weeks to some stock company making frequent changes of bill. These rights are valuable, and, since it is the run the manager has given the piece which makes it of interest for stock, he holds that a share in these rights belongs to him. They therefore only revert to the author if the manager fails to give a certain number of performances. This number varies according to the author's reputation and ability to hold out for his demands. So, unless the play has had so few performances as to be classed as a downright failure, the manager shares in these rights with the author, 50 per cent. each. If a play has been withdrawn from production as a semi-failure, it may still be a valuable stock property. A certain play, a dramatization of a popular novel, which failed on Broadway was used simultaneously by forty different stock companies.

Fifty-fifty is also the amount usual in arranging for novelization rights—that is, the turning of a successful and popular play into a novel. In other words, to sum up, the author, in addition to production right, which is his reason for leasing the play at all, leases to the manager moving-picture, novelization, and stock rights, under specified con-

ditions, and preferably for "50-50"; he reserves all other rights, the copyright, the publication (as a play), and the English and foreign dramatic rights, unless he contracts for the month's option previously mentioned.

Author's name. A clause in the contract should state that the writer's name is to be announced as author on all programs and advertising matter.

The novice, with a first play, may not be able to stand out for all of these clauses. But, knowing his rights, he will be able to make legitimate concessions intelligently.

Contracts for vaudeville sketches. In vaudeville, the arrangements are slightly different. Instead of royalties, the usual custom is a flat price each week the "act" plays. The reason is simple. A vaudeville sketch receives from the manager who "books" it on any particular circuit a certain sum of money each week, varying from $100 to $1,000 and over, according to the material and the star. This sum is not dependent on the box-office receipts, but is the same week after week—when the sketch plays. Therefore, the author of the sketch receives a certain sum weekly under the same conditions. This sum, in an average season, is usually twenty-five dollars a week, though it may be lower. Unless the author has a big reputation, which may add to the drawing value of the sketch, it does not often go over this figure. In a vaudeville season there are frequent "lay-offs" in which neither the company nor the author is paid. Sometimes the "act" will

play only three days in houses where the bill is changed twice a week. The sum received is reduced according to the number of performances.

In signing a vaudeville contract, the same reservations as to motion-picture and publishing rights should be made as in the contract for the dramatic stage. There is generally an advance royalty of two weeks' payment when the sketch is booked—though this may be waived if the author wishes to yield the point. A week, or two weeks, is usually allowed the manager free of royalty while "breaking the act in," which process consists in giving performances for the managers and the booking-offices at certain theaters before the act is booked for the season. Authors of big reputation, however, sometimes refuse to allow this, and are paid from the first performance. As in the case of the long play, the sketch must be produced a certain number of weeks each year—from ten to twenty—to be held by the producer.

When there are two authors, or collaborators, they arrange between themselves just what ratio of the royalty shall come to each. I spoke of this in a previous chapter when dealing with collaboration. Whatever arrangements are made as to the share of each, it is quite between themselves, and with it the manager has no concern, except to pay the specified royalty. If they take out a copyright, it is taken in both names, but there is only one copyright. It is advisable to draw up some sort of an agreement before collaboration starts.

Agent's fees. Where a play has been leased through an agent, the agent receives a percentage from the author's royalties during the run of the piece. The standard rate of commission is 10 per cent. This includes the collecting of the royalties from the manager for the author. Also, an agent will collect the royalties at a rate of 5 per cent. in cases where he has had no hand in placing the play. In Appendix C will be found the actual wording of the contract used by one of the reputable New York agents. In addition, I will quote No. 5 in the "Warnings to Dramatic Authors" printed in the *Bulletin of the Authors' League of America:* "It is well to be extremely cautious about committing your play to the hands of an agent who is not only an agent but also a playwright or a producing manager, or even interested financially in the business of any producing manager, as dramatic agents nowadays often are. You are apt to find your interests neglected in favor of the author-agent's own ventures, and that independent managers are distrustful of plays submitted them by agents who are also producing managers." Also No. 6: "Never sign a contract secured by an agent by which that agent becomes third party to the agreement." In the matter of stock rights, an agent should never be permitted to stipulate that all leasing of the play to stock companies should be solely through his agency.

Dramatization rights. Where a play has been dramatized from a book or story, the author of

the story and the playwright share royalties as collaborators, unless the dramatist buys the rights outright. The giving and selling of such rights rests entirely with the original author. The percentage each receives is again a matter of personal arrangement, varying according to the scope of the original story, and the reputation of either writer. If it is only the germ of an idea, and the dramatist must create characters and situations, building a new structure, the making of the terms would seem to be entirely up to the dramatist. But where the story is complete, the division would probably be half and half. These distinctions in no way alter the size of the royalties; they merely determine which proportion of the royalties each shall receive. There are no rules in the matter; it is all adjusted and arranged by mutual consent, which in some few cases may include the book's publisher. A dramatization must be copyrighted separately, since it is a new work, and considered distinct from the novel.

Copyright. You will notice that I have not mentioned copyright as the first necessity of the finished play. Many well-known writers do not take the trouble, maintaining that public performance establishes the authorship and makes it difficult to safely steal any portion of the play. The simple truth of the matter is that copyright law as it is at present does not really protect to any wonderful extent, although efforts are constantly being made for improvement, and in time we may have a law that will be a real safeguard against theft. Says

Richard Rogers Bowker: "Copyright law is exceptionally confused and confusing, and even the new American and British codes are not without such defects." Still, there is a law, and it is a deterrent in the stealing of plays and ideas, and production without consent of the author; authors use it for just the protection it gives them, and trust for the rest. Many dramatists have their plays printed as books, thus putting them under the protection of book copyright, which seems stronger than playright. And, as stated in an earlier chapter, it would be well if all produced plays were so published for the establishment of a permanent literature of the theater. But plays printed in pamphlet form for the use of actors are not covered by book copyright, according to the laws. It is rather complicated, the law being somewhat vague as to when a play is a book or just a play. The law says that the term "book" includes all printed literary works (except dramatic compositions) whether published as books or pamphlets. In this connection I had best refer you to the laws themselves. They will be sent you free of charge; it is only necessary to address the Register of Copyrights, Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Do not send stamps for return. For further information regarding the laws here and in other countries, read *Playright and Copyright in All Countries*, by the English barristers, Colles and Hardy, and published by Macmillan and Company, New York; *The Law of Copyright*, by J. B. Richardson, London:

Jordan and Sons; and, best of all for American writers, *Copyright: Its History and Its Law*, by Richard Rogers Bowker, New York: Houghton and Mifflin. You may find them in your local public library.

Play-pirates. It is a criminal offense to perform a play without permission of the owner of the copyright, which makes it possible at last to prosecute play-pirates who put on well-known and successful plays in obscure parts of the country under changed titles to avoid the paying of royalties to the owner. There was a time when this was done to an enormous degree and there seemed no way of stopping it. The actors were not to blame; they played the parts given them, often ignorant of the original play, especially if their experience had been gained far from the seat of the earlier productions. It was the experience of a young novice some twelve years ago; quite innocently she appeared in two such plays, and not having seen them during their season in New York, did not know until long afterward what they were. Also, on one occasion, a company of which I was one, " laying off " in Oklahoma, witnessed a performance, by a repertoire company, of Gillette's *All the Comforts of Home*, which the play " pirate " had dubbed *The Man from Kokomo*. To-day, owing to quite recent and more stringent laws, this is not so easy to do, since the punishment, if detected, is apt to be heavy.

For the rest, I shall quote freely from Richard Rogers Bowker's book on Copyright, in which you

will find most exhaustive information on this subject. The law states that the sole rights of a play belong to the author, just as in a book, and only himself can dispose of these rights. The rights include those of translation. To prevent infringement of the acting rights in other countries, there are International Copyright Laws which must be looked up.

In the matter of the translation of a copyright work, Mr. Bowker states: "The author of the original work has the right to prevent other translations, but the translator has no such rights to prevent translation by another translator, except as exclusive right to translate is conveyed or implied to him by the author of the original work. A work in the public domain, as a non-copyright work, or a work on which copyright has expired, may be translated by anyone, and the translation copyrighted, but such translator would not have the right to prevent translation by any other translator."

In regard to the title, I shall again quote Mr. Bowker: "There is no copyright protection for the title in itself, but it may be considered an essential part of the book. . . . Change of title would probably not invalidate the copyright, though it would make identification more difficult. 'Copyrighted under the title of ——' should be written on all copies whose titles have been changed. Titles are rather to be considered as trademarks which may be registered in the United States under the Trademarks Act of 1905-06, and protected by statutory

penalties, or may be protected on general principles of equity. . . . The use of a title to attract purchasers on the supposition that they are getting another work previously known by that title is a fraud punishable at common law."

It is illegal to put the words "Copyrighted, etc.," on a manuscript unless it is true. There is a fine of not less than $100 or more than $1,000. The copyright lasts twenty-eight years, with the right of renewal for another twenty-eight years, if registered within one year prior to the expiration of the original copyright.

A play scenario cannot be copyrighted, since it is obviously incomplete. It is only possible to protect the completed drama. As yet, it is extremely difficult to protect a moving-picture scenario.

Again I will quote from Mr. Bowker, especially as his remarks in regard to the room for improvement in the laws coincide with theatrical experience: "Dramatic copyright, in the wide sense, covers copyright in the specific sense, and playright, as to which latter common laws especially need statutory protection. . . . It might be alleged that dramatic compositions in book-form, or produced as books from type . . . should be classified as books and subjected to the manufacturing provisions; but this is distinctly not the letter of the law. . . . Copyright in the specific sense is, however, of less importance to the dramatic author than playright or performing right, which is also covered and protected specifically by the code of 1909, though in less accu-

rate, definite, and satisfactory provisions, involving in some respects serious questions."

In sending manuscripts to Washington to be copyrighted, the following is the law regarding postage according to the United States Copyright Code of 1909: "Section 14; That the postmaster to whom are delivered the articles deposited . . . shall, if requested, give a receipt therefor and shall mail them to their destination without cost to the copyright claimant." This receipt holds good if copies are lost in the mails.

Postage must be prepaid on the signed application containing copyright fee, as the law does not provide for free transmission as in the case of deposited copies. The application, with remittance, and the deposit copies should be sent separately and at the same time.

For fuller information along these lines, refer to the laws, and the quoted works.

CHAPTER XXIV

AND FINALLY

ACCIDENTAL ACCOMPLISHMENT—PRACTICAL ADVICE —THE OBVIOUS AND FAMILIAR—LEARN BY DOING —SERIOUSNESS OF THE WORK—TRYING AND FAILING—WHAT IS A GOOD PLAY?

Accidental accomplishment. It has been said to me since starting on this work: "Many of the things you say must not be done, *can* be, if they are done cleverly." I would like to emblazon that "if"; I have underscored it often, emphasized it frequently. For fear of a repetition of the same criticism, I say it again: you can do almost anything *if* you do it cleverly. But an *accidental* doing well of the thing that ought not to be done is not what is meant by *doing it cleverly.*

A story is told of Apelles, the famous Roman artist of antiquity, concerning his repeated efforts to achieve a certain effect—a war-horse, foaming and frothing at the mouth. Losing his temper at last in disgust at his continued failures, he picked up the sponge he had used to wipe his brushes, and hurled it blindly at the painting. By chance it landed on the horse's mouth. The blend of colors on the sponge, the blur caused by its striking the wet paint, produced just the effect for which he had

been fruitlessly striving. It is a good story; but as a child I remember feeling very distinctly that the artist did not deserve all the honor that particular painting brought him. It was accident, not skill. Expert riflemen say that a marksman who cannot "call his shot" (i.e., tell its destined mark on the target) at the instant he pulls the trigger is not a good "shot," even though that bullet finds the bull's-eye.

Practical advice. With experience and the guiding power of that inner sense, the dramatic instinct, it is quite possible to achieve distinct effects and happy results unconsciously. But that is not doing "the thing that should not be done." It is a very clear case of doing just the right thing, because a *feeling* for the theater is like a sixth sense. To win to a feeling that can be trusted is only possible after the tedious drudgery of study and practice. Therefore, in play-writing, as in everything else, if you do the things you should not do, be sure you do them so cleverly as to disguise the fact of your transgression.

I have left to others the theoretical side of all this work. Many excellent books are written on the subject, of value not only to the playwright, but to the playgoer. My aim has been to help the writer in the practical work of putting together his own play. Mr. Archer speaks of certain things being so obvious as to be unnecessary. Yet it is amazing how many of the things which have become obvious and trite to us of the theater are not at all either

one or the other to the novice. Every mention of the seeming obvious, every explanation of the familiar, has been called forth directly by actual questions and mistakes of would-be writers.

The conclusion arrived at here, as in almost every book on the subject, is as A. B. Walkley states: "There is no orthodox method of play-invention. It all depends on the kind of play—and the kind of playwright."

Learn by doing. But all are agreed that the theater must be studied, and certain general rules observed and absorbed before the work of writing begins. Of course, you can learn by doing, however immature, even impossible, your early efforts are. That is, you can learn, if you permit yourself to realize that these first efforts are lessons rather than finished products for the theater. If your idea is good, if you have a message, it will be written—at last—in proper form. The dramatist is one who has learned how to use the form he has chosen in such a way as to make dramatic presentation possible. No book, however well written, however comprehensive, can do more than point the way. It may be incidentally remarked, in answer to writers who resent the use of many "don'ts" in a book of this kind, that any sign-post which does not point out pitfalls and danger-spots is not much of a sign-post, however obvious the pitfalls may seem *after* our attention has been drawn to them.

One has only to read a very few of the effusions, the letters, the questions, of would-be writers to

realize how little is known by the laity of the great art of play-writing. Like any art which is worth mastering, it has to be studied, inside and out. Seeing plays will not show you how to write them, any more than looking at pictures will teach you how to paint. Both are necessary helps on the way.

Seriousness of the work. It is work to be taken seriously and in all sincerity. The aspirant earnestly desirous of doing something worth while will neglect nothing which will bring that idea to pass. And the thing not worth while is hardly worth the doing. But the form into which you put your idea is the form which the public will judge. Ignore, as dangerous half truths, the careless statements of several successful playwrights that technique is a side-issue. You are a novice; such statements are not for you.

Trying and failing. Remember this, too, so you need not fear to try and fail: few, if any, first plays succeed. Sometimes we hear of one, but we have no assurance that we may not be witnessing the third or fourth re-writing of the play. It can still be called the author's first, since the re-written version has resulted from his first transcript. But for a first play to be written and produced without re-writing of any kind is most unlikely, unusual, well-nigh impossible. As someone has said: "Plays are not written; they are re-written." From notes which have come to us, it is evident that Ibsen in many cases re-wrote his material many times. Sardou is said to have usually re-written his dialogue alone

three or four times *after* he had copied out his play for the fourth time! Two versions of Brieux's *Maternity* are published, the second being a later, and preferred, version. Therefore, if you write your first play with the thought that you are going to be perfectly willing to re-write it as often as necessary, you will save yourself much disappointment. Also, your chances of success are just that much the greater. Life is at your elbow; paper and pencil in front of you; the theater within reach. Will you accept the challenge? If so, here's success to you, and a new play for the stage!

What is a good play? As to what constitutes a good play? Who knows? One writer declares that any play that has successfully entertained you for an evening comes under this heading. Several plays in a season, which may come under the scathing criticism of one who knows, will succeed. Their authors belong to that happy class who have achieved the ability to do the wrong thing cleverly. Walter Pritchard Eaton makes another distinction between the good and the bad play, which may explain as well as any other: the good is caused by sincerity on the part of the writer, the bad by insincerity. And the success of any given play can only be judged by the effect it produces.

APPENDIX A

ANALYSIS OF "THE NIGGER"

As a concrete example of the working out of advice given in previous chapters you will find the following analyses helpful. I have reduced this play to scenario form, giving the dramatist's working out of his theme through the various scenes and situations. There has been no effort to select the "best" play for the purpose. The reasons for the use of this particular drama are first of all that it is an excellent example of an entirely American play dealing with an exclusively American problem. Further, it fulfills all the desiderata of a play—an interesting story, thrill, suspense, action, and most of all that condition of writing which demands that the drama must not only be a picture of life but a judgment on it. In *The Nigger*, Mr. Sheldon has not only shown us the conditions as they exist to-day, but gives us the reasons why such conditions confront the American public at this time. He not only presents these conditions and their reasons, but gives, so far as one man can, one of the solutions. One other reason for the use of this play as an example lies in the fact that it is published. The best way, therefore, to get full benefit out of both analyses is to study them with the plays beside you.

Many of the scenes contain only a few lines of dialogue; in one or two instances they contain none, consisting only of the transition from one mood to another in the exit and entrance of characters. So do not think, because I have divided Act One into twenty-three scenes, that all of these scenes are of equal length and importance. As we go along, I will try to make you see why the scenes were so written and the author's method of getting necessary information to his audience.

In Appendix B we find an example of more subtle development. Pinero's play, a perfect form of the "psychological drama," is its own excuse for use in this connection.

"THE NIGGER" *

An American Play in Three Acts

By Edward Sheldon

Produced at the New Theatre, New York City, December 4, 1909.

Act 1—June 3—"Morrow's Rest." Evening.
Act 2—February 23—The Governor's Study in his City Home. 10 A.M.
Act 3—February 26—The Governor's Private Office in the Capitol. Evening.
Place: The South.
Time: Now.

* Published by Macmillan & Co., New York.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PHILIP MORROW, of "Morrow's Rest." Sheriff; later Governor. [*Spoken of as "Phil" throughout scenario.*]

CLIFTON NOYES. President, Noyes' Distillery Works. [*Spoken of as Noyes.*]

JINNY. Morrow's quadroon "mammy."

GEORGIANA BYRD. Phil's fiancée. [*Spoken of as Georgie.*]

SENATOR THOMAS R. LONG. "The White Nigger."

JOE WHITE. An octoroon.

JAKE WILLIS.

MRS. BYRD, Georgie's mother.

PURDY. Deputy-Sheriff.

BARRINGTON, the Governor's private secretary.

SIMMS. Negro butler.

Chief-of-Police TILTON.

COLONEL KNAPP—5th Militia.

DOORKEEPER.

Rioters, soldiers, etc.

[*Note: On the play program these characters are given in the order of their first appearance. I have put them as nearly as possible in the order of their dramatic importance.*]

ACT ONE

SCENE 1—Simms, the butler, and Jinny. This scene is short. In it the important fact given to the audience is that the aged Jinny has a good-for-nothing grandson, and that he is likely to get into trouble. [*This plants Joe's identity and character.*]

SCENE 2—Enter Georgie and Noyes. Simms exits, followed presently by Jinny. The next important fact

conveyed by the dialogue is that Jinny has been in Morrow's family since the days of Phil's grandfather. We learn that Noyes is Phil's cousin. Their grandfathers had quarreled about a mulatto woman in the '40's. [*This fact is the most important "exposition" so far, as on this dead mulatto slave hangs the later development. Note how this fact is planted here and its frequent recurrence in later dialogue.*] Noyes has been searching in Morrow's attic for some family papers which will enable him to join the Sons of the Revolution. His manner and one or two sentences convey to the audience that he has found something else. [*Here is an example of one way of conveying a dramatic undercurrent. He tells Georgie nothing, and does not arouse her suspicions. The information is subtly carried solely to the audience.*] Georgie mentions Mamie Willis. [*This is to give us a living picture of a girl who never appears in the play, but who plays a tragic part in later developments of the act.*] Noyes proposes to Georgie, and is refused. In spite of his good blood, he is not quite a gentleman. He has grown rich on the liquor traffic, has worked since he was ten, with no income but his father's debts. He discovers that Georgie is in love with Phil. He tells her that he has come to ask Phil to run for Governor of the state, because he is strongly anti-negro. Georgie exits into the house to call Phil. [*In this long scene in which is conveyed so much information of use to the audience in its appreciation of what follows, there is not one word of monologue or aside. The information is conveyed by the direct dialogue, and the facial expressions and actions of the players.*]

SCENE 3—Noyes, alone a second, shows by his manner that he is thinking deeply about something. We understand that this has to do with what he found in the attic. [*Not a word spoken.*]

SCENE 4—Enter Phil. Georgie has sent him out to talk to Noyes. Noyes tells him that Georgie has refused him, and wonders if Phil has told her about his (Noyes') affair with a mulatto girl. Phil has not, and adds: "No white woman would touch you with a ten-yard pole." [*The object of this is to give us Phil's attitude on the question.*] A second reference is made to the gossip concerning the quarrel between their grandfathers, to which the remark about Noyes' affair led easily. Noyes speaks of the old letter he found in the attic. [*Again we get a hint of the dramatic undercurrent and possible trouble for Phil. There is an inkling of suspicion as to the purity of Phil's blood in the references to this ancient quarrel and this new-found letter. The story is being planted.*] Phil changes the subject, without any suspicion of what is in Noyes' mind. Noyes tells him of the political offer. Senator Long is mentioned as his opponent, a friend to the down-trodden negro, and opposed to liquor. [*This is also exposition, since Long plays an important part in Phil's development. Also the audience receives an impression of local prejudice against negro franchise.*] Noyes owns a newspaper in addition to his liquor interests. [*Another important fact planted.*] Phil consents to run, but refuses to pledge anything. He happens not to approve of Prohibition, so is willing to oppose Long.

SCENE 5—Enter Georgie. She congratulates Phil on his political opportunities. Exit Noyes.

SCENE 6—In this scene we learn through the dialogue that Georgie and Phil were childish sweethearts. A little pleasant reminiscence. He proposes and is accepted.

SCENE 7—The love-scene is interrupted by the noise of horse's hoofs. Wondering what it can be, Georgie exits into the house. Enter Purdy, the deputy-sheriff.

[*These preceding scenes have been chiefly exposition. With this necessary knowledge in our minds, the drama now moves rapidly.*]

SCENE 8—Purdy announces a case of rape—the girl is Mamie Willis. [*This is why Georgie mentioned Mamie Willis earlier, so we might share some of the horror one always feels when the victim of any disaster is someone we know.*] Phil is determined as sheriff to stop any lynching. The guilty negro is Joe White. [*Now we know why we heard so much of him in the first scene.*]

SCENE 9—Enter Noyes from house, announcing a telephone call from the jail. [*This scene is but two lines.*]

SCENE 10—Enter Mrs. Byrd, followed by Georgie. She is very autocratic, a grand dame of the old South, and insists that the negro ought to be lynched, and that Phil must make no effort to stop the lynching. Noyes also argues with him. If Phil helps the negro, he may lose the vote of the convention which is strongly anti-negro. Phil tells Georgie to ask Simms to send for Jinny. Georgie exits into house. Phil sends Purdy to see that the jail cells are made secure. Purdy exits. Phil takes Mrs. Byrd back to the house. Both exit. [*This scene is played rapidly, as Phil makes*

his plans and issues orders in spite of opposition.]

SCENE 11—Noyes alone, lights a cigar. Enter Jinny, terrified. Joe is her grandson and she fears for him. He had been drinking, and now has come home to her to hide. She is sure Phil will help him. [*The suspense of this scene is heightened by the first sounds of the bloodhounds in the distance.*]

SCENE 12—Phil enters. Jinny tells him Joe is hiding in the shrubbery.

SCENE 13—Enter Joe, cringing, panic-stricken. Phil loathes him and the thing he has done, but, as an officer of the law, will protect him from the mob. Jinny pleads with Phil to hide him in the house. Phil seems disposed to yield, but Noyes protests that such an act will ruin his political career. Phil argues that if Joe goes to the flimsy jail the mob will surely get him there.

SCENE 14—Georgie enters. Her mother is getting nervous. Phil sends her in. She catches a glimpse of Joe and with a shudder returns to the house.

SCENE 15—Noyes reminds Phil that Joe will be in the same house with Georgie if Phil elects to save him that way. [*This is the reason Georgie was brought on at this stage of the dialogue. A visual reminder of her presence in the house is better than a mere mention of her. You will note that, while there is this dramatic reason for her interruption, the author has given her a natural reason for entrance, in her mother's nervousness, and has not allowed her to simply walk on and off.*] Phil decides that it will be best to get the wardens and make a break for the jail. Noyes hears the mob getting closer. [*The dramatic suspense of these scenes is height-*

ened by the sounds from without, our knowledge that a mob with hounds is searching for the negro, who is still on the stage.] Noyes exits quickly to telephone to the jail.

Scene 16—Joe grovels behind Phil. Jinny moans in terror. Phil takes out his revolver and waits. Noise grows louder. The mob does not enter, but the light of torches is seen and we hear the movement and voices. Jake Willis enters.

Scene 17—As the father of the victim, he demands Joe. Half crazed with grief, he is yet quiet and determined. The girl has just died. Phil sympathizes deeply, but reminds Jake of his own frequent statements about the crime of lynching. Phil states that the law must take its course, and he pledges his honor to the outraged father that the trial will be quick and justice done. The mob without frequently interrupts by calls to Jake.

Scene 18—Enter Noyes and Purdy, with two jail officers. Phil orders Joe handcuffed. Wardens drag him to his feet and attach handcuffs.

Scene 19—Jake turns to the place where the mob is concealed behind the shrubbery and tells the men that the Sheriff will not give up the negro and that the wardens are going to take him to the jail. He directs the mob to take up certain positions surrounding the house and grounds. Phil angrily reminds him that his men are fully armed and will defend themselves. Jake exits. The mob is heard departing.

Scene 20—Phil gives hurried instructions to the men in charge of Joe. Joe flings himself at Jinny's feet, begging her to help him. The wardens pull him up and drag him away.

SCENE 21—Phil starts to follow. Jinny kneels to him, frantically begging him to keep Joe in the house. She adds in her extremity: "You must keep him here because he is your——" and stops in terror at what she was about to say. Noyes puts his hand suddenly on her shoulder. [*Here is further confirmation of our impression that something is wrong with Phil's ancestry. We suspect that Noyes knows something. His touching Jinny at this point tells he knows what she would say and wants to stop her. This is an example of the number of times important information is repeated, and not always by the use of lines.*] Jinny releases Phil, whose knees she has been clutching. He rushes past her, but Noyes grapples with him and stops him. Enter Georgie.

SCENE 22—As it is dusk she does not fully take in the situation, but tells Noyes that a telephone message says there is a telegram for him. Noyes, without releasing Phil, asks her if she will take it for him. She re-enters the house. [*In addition to the ordinary reasons for Georgie's entrance at these points is the dramatic undercurrent which conveys a reminder of her presence in Phil's life.*]

SCENE 23—Noyes still holds Phil, arguing with him. Georgie enters, announcing that the message states that Morrow is likely to be nominated for Governor by a large majority. A fearful scream is heard at a distance. Jinny crumples up on the ground. Noyes releases Phil. Georgie starts violently and covers her ears, then comes slowly to Phil. He wishes now he had not allowed himself to be persuaded and had kept Joe there. He turns his head

away from her as if ashamed of his official failure. Noyes stands apart, watching them.

Curtain

ACT TWO

Governor Morrow's study in his city home, 10 A.M. Nine months later.

SCENE 1—Curtain rises on an empty room. Outside the windows can be heard the noises of an angry mob. There is the sound of an occasional gun-shot. A small party of drunken rioters can be plainly heard, laughing, singing, firing off revolvers. A man's voice shouts, asking where " all the niggers are."

SCENE 2—Simms enters showing on Mrs. Byrd and Georgie. They are much agitated. The drunken rioters move on. We learn that the Governor (Phil) has been out since the rioters started the day before. Simms exits. Georgie states that it is the Mayor who is so unpopular, because he put negroes on the police force.

SCENE 3—Enter Barrington, the secretary. He is a lively young man of twenty-five. He greets the ladies gaily. Mrs. Byrd tells him she and Georgie have packed up a few things and have come to the Governor's, feeling themselves safer there. [*It is essential that all the important characters should be assembled in one place for the purposes of drama. A good excuse is therefore necessary to bring Georgie to the Governor's home. It does not just " happen."*] Barrington says the militia has been sent for. The riots are anti-negro, and the saloons have added to the trouble by selling liquor freely. Most of the rioters are drunk. A news-

paper is calling an "extra." "Niggahs killing the whites!" Mrs. Byrd is terrified. Barrington tells her it is the whites who are rioting, and this is only Mr. Noyes' paper, which has been adding to the trouble by running off extras every half hour, keeping popular feeling at a high tension. Telephone rings. Barrington answers; we gather that there is trouble with the rioters at the railroad. Drunken whites are attacking the blacks everywhere. Mrs. Byrd laments that the wedding will have to be postponed. [*The mention of Georgie's and Phil's engagement at this point has a dramatic purpose.*]

Scene 3—Jinny enters, bringing in coffee. [*Phil's engagement to Georgie and the entrance of this old woman now remind us of the shadow in the background.*] Jinny appears lifeless. She serves the coffee. More noise of rioters without. A distant door is heard to slam. Barrington says it is Phil.

Scene 4—Enter Phil. All greet him. He is tired but cheerful. Georgie is proud of the way he has handled the situation. Phil urges the ladies to go and rest, as they have had a bad night. Jinny goes with them to help Mrs. Byrd.

Scene 5—Phil rings for Simms and tells him he is expecting the Chief of Police. Simms exits.

Scene 6—Phil tells Barrington he is going to weed out every negro on the police force. Barrington tells him of the telephone message. Another "extra" is heard: "White woman shot by a negro." Phil tells Barrington to go down and stop the newsboy. Barrington exits—the newsboy's voice suddenly ceases.

Scene 7—Phil goes to the telephone. Rings up the editor of the newspaper. He reminds him that he

has already ordered these inflammatory extras stopped. He learns that Noyes' orders were to continue. Phil tells him, if he brings out another edition inside of twenty-four hours, he will put the whole staff under arrest. Hangs up the receiver. [*We see here how the situation is forcing Phil and Noyes into opposite camps.*] Enter Barrington.

Scene 8—Barrington says the boy had already sold one hundred copies, but he's fixed him—he won't sell any more. Phil dictates a telegram to the Attorney-General, asking that two regiments of infantry be held as reserves. He asks Barrington to go personally to Senator Long's house and ask him to see him as soon as possible. Barrington is surprised. Long is Prohibition and the Governor has intended to veto his Bill. Simms enters, announcing the Chief of Police. Barrington and Simms exit. [*The dramatic value of showing us Phil's change of position toward Long and toward Noyes' paper which is stirring up anti-negro feeling is that, coming* before *the later revelations, it tells us that Phil's attitude has already become the broadly human one and is not caused by expediency. This strengthens our appreciation of his character.*]

Scene 9—Enter Tilton, chief of police. Phil tells him all the negro police must go, as a scene he has just witnessed at the City Hall has convinced him it is necessary. Tilton says many are so light-colored that—— Phil interrupts him, saying that either a man is a nigger or he is not. [*The drama conveyed in this statement is its reminder of the shadow we already suspect.*] Tilton agrees with him. Simms enters, announcing that Mr. Noyes is waiting, and exits. Phil tells Tilton to use every man possible

to keep the drinking bars closed. Tilton says he sent orders yesterday. Phil says they have not been obeyed. Tilton promises to do his best. Enter Noyes.

SCENE 10—He greets Tilton, who exits. Phil tells Noyes that he has repeated his orders to close every bar in the city. Noyes tells him that he'll give a bad impression; people will think he has become a Prohibitionist. Phil does not care; the trouble never would have started if the men had not been drunk. Noyes agrees it's all right temporarily. Phil says it's for good. He reminds Noyes that the whites brought the negroes to this country against their will and are responsible for them. They are only children, and pouring liquor down their throats is not helping them. [*We remember that Joe was drunk when he committed the crime of Act* 1.] Phil announces that the state is going "dry." Noyes will not believe him, has been sure he would veto Long's Bill. Phil is going to let it pass. Noyes pleads: he will lose everything. Phil is sorry, but cannot help it. Noyes reminds him that this was why he was elected—because he was anti-negro and anti-Prohibition. Phil tells him that he has refused to make any promises. Noyes threatens to force him. Phil tells him to go ahead, the Bill will pass. [*Here we reach the dramatic climax toward which all this has been tending. The dramatist has created a situation in which the hero forces his enemy into a corner—a corner which means his (Noyes') actual livelihood, which the hero will sacrifice for the sake of a principle.*] Furious, Noyes takes out a wallet, extracting from it a sheet of paper. He hands it to Phil, who

takes it. Noyes remarks while Phil is reading it that Belle was Jinny's sister. [*This gives us a clue to the contents. This whole episode is an example of the way an important crisis is held off until the proper moment in the drama. Consider if Noyes had displayed this letter on the occasion of Georgie's acceptance of Phil and refusal of himself. That might have been a moment of temptation to him. But the play would have ended there. Instead, he does something entirely consistent with his character and holds it out as a weapon to use should the Governor prove unmanageable.*] Phil is not conscious of any reference to himself and asks Noyes where he got it. Noyes tells him; this is a copy. Phil has no understanding of what Noyes is driving at. Noyes tells him that the baby referred to is Phil's father. Phil is only amused and laughs at the impossibility. Noyes argues. Phil smilingly asks him if he really believes that Phil's grandmother was a negress, and is frankly surprised to find that Noyes does. Then he grows angry, but not at all alarmed. Noyes asks that Jinny be called. Phil consents, so as to have the matter settled. He rings for Simms, and sends for Jinny. Phil doubts that Noyes ever really did find the original of such a letter. Jinny enters.

Scene 11—They question her, then Noyes traps her, by telling her of what she started to say about Joe in Act One. Phil reads the letter aloud, and Jinny breaks down at these lines from her long-dead sister. Phil learns the truth: he is an octoroon. Not showing his feelings, he gently sends Jinny from the room.

SCENE 12—Phil asks to see the original of the letter. Noyes takes it out; a faded rose falls from the letter. Phil picks it up—it is a white rose—he is reminded of Georgie. He also remembers that his grandfather died fighting gloriously in a battle of the Mexican War, and had evidently kept the old letter because he had loved its writer. His grandfather's wife had a baby which had died and the new-born child of the mulatto-girl had been substituted for it and she herself sold "down the river." The letter was her heart-broken farewell to his grandfather. Noyes tries to return to the matter of the Long Bill and its veto, and hints that perhaps Phil has changed his mind. Phil has not. Noyes threatens to tell the truth. Noyes is the real heir to the Morrow estates; he will give up his rights if Phil will veto the Bill. They argue. Phil definitely refuses. Barrington enters with a telegram. [*Again we have an example of the crisis held off. Barrington's interruption stops the discussion and postpones Noyes' final action, which would force Phil's hand at once.*]

SCENE 13—The telegram is a wire from the Colonel of the militia regiment. They will arrive at eleven. Drunken rioters are heard outside. Barrington goes to the window. Noyes exits. [*We are reminded by the noise of rioting that the duties of the Governor must take precedence of the troubles of the man. He can do nothing until this present situation is settled. Had the dramatist allowed Noyes to force his hand at this crisis, the audience would have been compelled to witness a confused political situation. The political situation is not the main theme, but only the background against*

which the hero's problem and that of his race is worked out.]

SCENE 14—The mob outside stops to cheer the Governor. Georgie enters. [*Note how her entrances are usually at a dramatic crisis to point the difficulty of Phil's position as a negro.*] Barrington says that Long will call at seven. He exits to go to the train to meet the Colonel and his regiment.

SCENE 15—Georgie is surprised at Phil's expecting Long. She reminds him that it will be used against him politically. Phil tells her he is going to pass the Long Bill. Georgie is shocked: Long receives negroes, he calls on them, treats them as he treats any white man. They will call him what they call Long, the "White Nigger." [*Note the dramatic effectiveness at this point of the use of Long's nickname.*] Phil says he has something to tell her. She must break their engagement. She pleads to know his reasons, since he still loves her. Phil tells her of his mulatto grandmother. She is horrified, and instinctively recoils from him. [*This shrinking from her lover is why earlier in the play at various times and even in the scene preceding we heard expressions from her of the feeling toward the negroes: the inability to see them in any capacity but as servants. Without our knowledge of this inbred feeling, her shrinking from Phil would lose our sympathy. With it, we understand her point of view and the inevitable shock of what to her is terrible news.*] He pleads that he is the same man he was. He takes her in his arms. She tears herself away, crying hysterically, shrinking in disgust. Angrily, he tells her that his grandmother, a negro slave-girl, knew more of love than she did.

He argues and pleads his love, beside himself with the shock of the way she has taken his news. A knock at the door interrupts. Barrington enters.

Scene 16—Georgie slips out. [*This interruption was necessary to later developments, since the unhappy girl needs time to face her trouble. The scene continued might make her say and do things that would prevent the present working out of the play.*] Barrington announces the soldiers. Enter Colonel Knapp and two other officers. Phil recovers himself. Barrington introduces Colonel Knapp. As he and Phil shake hands and exchange greetings, the Curtain falls. [*You see, the curtain does not fall on Georgie's exit. We must again be reminded of the Governor's position in the community and the crisis he is facing.*]

ACT THREE

The Governor's office in the Capitol. Three days later.

Scene 1—Phil is opening his mail, Barrington waiting to take down the replies. One is an invitation to speak at a dedication of a negro college. Phil is not sure he approves. Barrington reminds him he once was sure he did not. Phil asks him to file the letter until Monday; he will think it over. We learn the riots are over, the troops leaving that day. Phil asks for Senator Long's Bill, and tells Barrington to bring Long in at once on his arrival. His last instruction is to give Barrington a list of six of the most prominent negroes in the city, asking them to meet him and Senator Long and

Speaker Evans next day. Barrington is surprised. Senator Long is announced. Barrington exits.

Scene 2—Phil alone, shows by his manner his despair and fatigue. Senator Long enters.

Scene 3—We learn from the dialogue that Phil and Long have already had one long talk. Phil is looking at the negro question from a different light. Long says: "You can't set free a race of slaves just by knocking off their chains." He believes in education, in helping them to help themselves. He adds that bringing the negro here was bad, but God lets men turn the bad into good, and that the United States would be a better nation for having to grapple with the negro problem. It is not right to punish the negro for conditions the white man has brought on him. Long convinces Phil of this new point of view. We gather that Phil has made up his mind to something, which by his manner concerns his own position. Long asks him to speak to the troops on their way to the station. Phil consents. Long exits.

Scene 4—Phil rings to have Mr. Noyes brought in—he has been waiting. Enter Noyes.

Scene 5—Noyes has said he'd come again on Friday to find out what Phil means to do about the Long Prohibition Bill. He has been drinking. Phil has not changed his mind; he has not yet signed the Bill, but will have done so by four o'clock. Noyes pleads with him that the Bill will ruin him. Phil is sorry. Noyes reminds him that the Morrow estates are really his, but Phil can make it up to him by vetoing the Bill. [*This seems like repetition, but it is natural under the circumstances, also dramatic, since it serves to drive home the conditions*

prevailing between the two men. Also, the scene is played in a different mood.] Noyes finally threatens that if Phil does not veto the Bill while he is there, he will go direct to the office of his newspaper and give out the full story: who and what Phil is. As he threatens, Phil quickly seats himself, draws a document toward him, and writes a few words. [*We remember that earlier in the Act he had asked Barrington to bring him the Bill.*] As Noyes finishes, Phil tells him the Bill is now a law, and orders him to "get out!" Noyes tries to snatch the Bill from him. Phil rings the bell. Enter Doorkeeper. Phil hands him the document to be given to Mr. Barrington to put in the safe, and then to come to him. Doorkeeper exits, with the Bill. Noyes laughs at Phil: even if he has ruined his business, Noyes will be rich on Phil's inheritance. He calls Phil a mulatto—Phil starts for him as Barrington enters.

Scene 6—Barrington says the Bill is in the safe. Phil hesitates. Then Barrington says Miss Byrd is waiting. Phil will see her. [*Again the dramatic value of the woman's entrance at a crucial moment. Being called a mulatto has infuriated the white man in Phil and he almost seems to intend to recall the Bill. Georgie's arrival brings back to him the fact that he cannot marry a white woman.*] Noyes exits to go to the paper, asking impudently about the wedding as he goes out.

Scene 7—Phil has remained unmoved. He asks Barrington to send Miss Byrd in. Barrington exits.

Scene 8—Phil alone a moment, tense, nervous. [*There are no lines, no monologue at these points. Only*

the manner, the movements of the character alone on the stage.] Enter Georgie.

SCENE 9—She has not yet told her mother of their broken engagement. He says she must. She refuses to break the engagement. She loves him—nothing will come between them. She asks forgiveness for her manner when he first told her. He resists the impulse to take her in his arms, and asks her to sit so they may talk. He tells her that people will know he is a negro; Noyes knows. Phil will make the announcement himself when he speaks to the crowds with the soldiers. She tells him it will end his career. He knows it and will resign at once. She loves him and still insists on marrying him. She pleads with him not to give her up. He breaks down, but pulls himself together. Long has shown him a way to use his life—he repeats Long's doctrines about using the bad and turning it into good. He realizes her lot is hardest because he has a work to do; but she can help by being brave. We get the impression that his plans include the working out of some way for the solution and betterment of the negro problem, though he only touches on it. The lovers say good-by. Barrington enters.

SCENE 10—He announces the troops. Colonel Knapp is outside. Phil asks him to invite the officers in. Barrington goes to the door and calls them. Enter Mrs. Byrd, Colonel Knapp, and other officers and legislators, including Senator Long, and some reporters. They exchange greetings.

SCENE 11—The crowd is noisy outside. The troops are heard arriving. Colonel Knapp looks out. Calls Phil to the balcony to speak to them. Phil, re-

membering what he is to do, turns to Georgie and asks her if she feels like remaining. She says she is standing back of him every minute, and will remain. She clasps her hands against her breast, as he steps out on to the balcony. As he raises his hand to stop the cheering the Curtain falls.

There has been some discussion as to whether this unfinished ending is correct; that in view of the enthusiastic cheering he may get no opportunity to make his announcement. But it is safe to say that with Noyes already at the newspaper office preparing a statement for the press, Phil will make this occasion serve his purpose. As to whether the play should have been continued until the announcement was made, and the audience permitted to hear it and note its effect on the people in the room with him, there may be a legitimate difference of opinion. This may be a *scene à faire*, a scene we have a right to expect; it may be a scene which we can better imagine for ourselves, since its presentation would only prolong the agony and bring us to no other solution in the end. The play itself as it stands presents many examples of things the book has tried to explain. If you have read the analysis with the book of the play beside you, you have noted how the dialogue and action have presented this story.

APPENDIX B

SCENARIO: "THE SECOND MRS. TANQUERAY" *

Drama in Four Acts by Arthur W. Pinero

ACT ONE

Curtain rises on dinner scene at Tanqueray's rooms in London. Dinner is nearly over. Tanqueray, a handsome man of forty-two; Misquith, stout and forty-seven; Jayne, a prosperous physician of forty-eight or -nine, are seated at table. Morse, Tanqueray's servant, is placing cigars and spirit-lamp on table beside Tanqueray, then exits.

Conversation shows that one old friend has not yet come, though expected—Cayley Drummle. Also that Tanqueray has an announcement to make, which is why he has invited his three best friends to dinner. This announcement he feels they will not approve, and it is possible this will be their last meeting. He is going to be married. His friends are astonished that he should feel such a thing likely to cause any change. He refuses to tell her name. They drink a toast to Mrs. Aubrey Tanqueray. They all agree to go later to find Drummle, and Tanqueray asks permission to finish a few notes before going. He goes to the other end of the room and sits at a writing table and begins to write.

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Jayne and Misquith discuss his peculiar manner of announcing his approaching marriage. He has been a widower for some years. While they whisper, Morse enters, announcing Drummle.

Drummle enters briskly. He is a little man of about forty-five. Tanqueray comes forward to greet him. His manner is humorously excited. His apology contains the information that, just as he was about to start for dinner at Tanqueray's, he received a note from an old friend of his mother's to come at once, as she was in "sad trouble." He had ten minutes to spare and so hurried to Lady Orreyed. At her home he had found everything upset; in brief, that her son and heir, George Orreyed, had married a certain Mabel Hervey, a notorious woman of the under-world. Aubrey intimates that they none of them really know anything of her, and with an apology returns to his notes.

The other three continue to discuss George Orreyed's misalliance. Tanqueray at first writes, then listens. Finally, impatient, he gathers up his letters, and says he will finish them in the other room. He exits.

Drummle is worried; he fears he has annoyed his friend. The others tell him that Tanqueray has just announced his approaching marriage to a woman he does not name. Drummle is anxious; asks the others, when they go, to leave him behind with Tanqueray. He tells them of what he knows of Tanqueray's unhappy first marriage to a cold, austere woman, who had insisted on sending their only daughter to a convent at a very early age. Later, the mother died, making her husband promise that the girl should remain in the convent and

complete her education. The girl is now nineteen, has refused to come home to her father, and intends to become a nun. Tanqueray has just said good-by to her. As Drummle reaches this point, Tanqueray re-enters.

A little chatting between the four men, then Jayne and Misquith take their leave. Drummle and Tanqueray are alone.

Tanqueray seems surprised that he has not gone with the others. Drummle thinks it best to talk things over, and encourages Tanqueray to do so. The name of the lady is revealed. Drummle has met her, and knows her past history which has linked her name intimately with that of several men. Tanqueray also knows these episodes to be true, because Paula has confessed them. He feels her to be a different sort of woman from the girl who has married George Orreyed. The two discuss the situation, which has been brought about by Tanqueray's loneliness, and the fact that he injures no one. While they talk, Morse enters and announces that the lady wishes to see him. Drummle hurries to take his leave. He goes out and Tanqueray goes with him.

Morse puts some unopened letters on the mantelpiece against the clock. Tanqueray re-enters.

Morse draws his attention to the letters, and exits.

Tanqueray goes to door and calls Paula. She enters, and greets him affectionately. He chides her for coming to his rooms. She takes the matter lightly, and sits to eat some of the fruit left on the table. She tells him that she has spent the evening alone dreaming of him and their future life together, surrounded by the

nicest people, none of whom had ever heard of her or her life. She has written him a letter giving him a list of these old affairs. She asks him to read it after she has gone, and if he feels he cannot marry her, he is to send a messenger next morning. He refuses to even consider it, and burns the letter, unread. She tells him that if ever anything serious, that she cares about, happens to her, she will kill herself. Then she laughs, back to her gay mood, and exits.

Tanqueray alone. He looks after her, then turns to the letters on the mantel. Recognizes the writing on one, and takes it down quickly. It is from Ellean, his daughter, telling him that she has had a change of heart, and that her duty as his daughter is by his side in his loneliness. Paula suddenly re-enters, in her cloak. He looks at her as if not seeing her. She teases him about not waiting until she had gone, to read his letters. He apologizes. She asks him to take her to her carriage. They exit together.

Curtain

ACT TWO

Tanqueray and Paula are seated at breakfast at their home in Surrey. He is reading his letters. Two servants hand dishes. They exit, and Tanqueray lays down his letters. Their conversation shows some slight annoyance on Paula's part at Tanqueray's greater interest in his daughter, who is out with her dog, than in herself. He shows her that she is unjust, and she begs forgiveness. Notes that one of his letters is from Drummle. Tanqueray tells her he is staying with a friend in the neighborhood, a Mrs. Cortelyon, who has never called on Paula. Tanqueray says that Drummle's visit to her

is at an end, and he is coming there to call that morning, and they can invite him to stay with them. Paula is pleased enough, but the conversation shows that she is bored. Tanqueray sees a letter in her writing, waiting to be mailed. It is addressed to the wife of George Orreyed, the former Mabel Hervey, now Lady Orreyed. Further conversation shows that Paula's sensibility of the state of affairs is not as keen as it might be, since she does not see why there is anything wrong with the woman now that she is properly married, nor any great difference between Mabel and herself. Aubrey throws the letter down, and quietly takes up his newspaper. Paula has one of her sudden changes of mood and says she is sorry. She tells him that the letter contains an invitation to the Orreyeds to visit them. He looks helplessly at her. She bursts out that she is tired of their life and its dullness, just the three, themselves and Ellean. Tanqueray suggests that when people begin to come—she interrupts with the statement that no one means to come. She is particularly bitter against Mrs. Cortelyon, who had been an old friend of Tanqueray and his first wife. She suggests that since his set will not take her up, that he might have joined hers. She sees suddenly that she is hurting him, and is again all penitence. Ellean enters.

She is a grave Madonna-like girl of nineteen. Paula kisses her affectionately, while Ellean hardly responds. Paula sits at the piano, and rattles off a gay melody. Behind her back, father and daughter kiss affectionately and furtively. The servants enter to clear away the breakfast things. As Paula plays, the two chat. Tanqueray suggests that Ellean be more with Paula, as the latter likes company. Ellean says that they are

together nearly all day, but she is not naturally lively. She will offer to go down with Paula to the village. He thanks her. Ellean exits.

Paula stops playing, and asks if he and Ellean have had their little confidence. She shows that she is jealous of Ellean, also that she craves the girl's affection. She begs him to teach Ellean to love her, and promises to tear up the letter to Lady Orreyed. He is glad, and asks her to consider Ellean and "that woman" side by side. This makes her angry, because his thought is again first of Ellean. Ellean re-enters.

Tanqueray, clenching his hands, goes out. Ellean asks if he is angry. Paula says that she drives him distracted because she is jealous. Ellean says she has known it, and it has hurt her, and asks Paula if she wants her to go away. Paula begs her to try to love her. Ellean shows her distress, tries to respond, and cannot. Paula is hurt and angry. A servant enters, announcing Drummle. Exits.

Enter Drummle. All shake hands. Ellean tells Paula that her father wishes her to go with Paula to the village; does she care to have her? Paula coldly consents, and asks her to tell the servant to get the cart ready. Ellean exits.

Paula shows her dissatisfaction to Drummle. She refers to certain jolly days in one of her earlier affairs when she had met Drummle as a friend of the man's. Drummle stares at her in shocked surprise. Enter Tanqueray.

Tanqueray greets him cordially. He invites him to pay them a visit. Drummle accepts. Paula is delighted

at a new interest and goes out to plan for his visit.

Tanqueray tells Drummle that he is worried about Ellean and his wife. It would be pleasanter if the two were friends, and yet, for Ellean's sake, he is afraid: Paula has so many curious warped notions to which she gives the freest expression. Drummle suggests that perhaps Tanqueray is making a mistake in keeping Ellean from all knowledge of evil or in supposing her so ignorant of it; it would be better for her to go about more. Tanqueray reminds him that if she does, sooner or later she must learn who and what her stepmother was. Drummle tells him that it is inevitable she should, in any case, and the news will be easier to bear if her knowledge of the world and its people is greater. Tanqueray reminds him that he has no way of introducing Ellean to the proper friends because of his present circumstances; if there were only some woman friend. They hear noise of wheels. Tanqueray supposes them to be Paula's cart. Drummle goes to the window, and says they belong to Mrs. Cortelyon's cart; she is then announced by the servant. Tanqueray is surprised. Drummle explains that Mrs. Cortelyon has decided she has been unkind in not calling sooner and has brought him over that morning, and wants to take Ellean abroad with her.

Enter Ellean and Mrs. Cortelyon. She is a handsome woman of forty-five. She greets Tanqueray cordially, and asks for Paula. Drummle and Ellean talk apart. Mrs. Cortelyon apologizes frankly for her neglect of Paula, but begs to be allowed to make amends and be friends once more. Enter Paula, dressed for driving.

She greets Mrs. Cortelyon with ostentatious and cold politeness, pretending never to have heard of her; she seems to take delight in making Mrs. Cortelyon's position awkward and uncomfortable. Drummle comes over closer to Mrs. C. Mrs. C. speaks of her girlhood friendship for the first Mrs. T. Ellean comes closer to her to listen. Paula notices this, and sneers. Ellean shows her pleasure in Mrs. C.'s personality. Paula notices this, also. Mrs. C. broaches the subject of taking Ellean with her to Paris, and then to London for the season. Tanqueray thanks her. Paula is silent. Paula then shows her suspicion that this has been planned by Ellean and her husband behind her back, and is glad that it has not. She asks Ellean what she wants to do, and Ellean begs to go. Tanqueray consents, but Paula feels that they are taking Ellean away from her society. She barely nods good-by to Mrs. C. Tanqueray and Drummle go out, then Ellean and Mrs. C. Paula throws herself with a fierce cry on a chair.

Tanqueray re-enters. Sees she has removed her hat and coat, and asks if she is not going out. He asks if she is angry about Ellean and Mrs. C. She shows by her manner and speech that she is strung to the highest pitch of tension. She rings for a servant, who enters. She tells him to have the groom drive down at once to the village and mail a letter. She hands him the letter to Lady Orreyed. Servant exits. Tanqueray asks her to recall the letter. She refuses, and he starts to do it himself. She threatens, if he does so, she will walk out of the house. She is furious at his letting Ellean go with a woman who has neglected to call on her for two months and who with her first visit is permitted to take away his daughter. She considers it an insult to

herself. She claims this justifies her in seeking companions of her own. He remonstrates, but she exits, saying only, "We'll see!"

Curtain

ACT THREE

After dinner in the drawing-room in the Tanqueray home. Lady Orreyed, a pretty, affected doll of a woman, is sitting on an ottoman. Paula is sitting at a table. She looks pale and unhappy. Lady Orreyed has been taking a nap and wakes up. A servant enters with coffee. George Orreyed comes in from the lawn. He is a vacuous-looking man of about thirty-five. He sits on the settee and falls asleep. Lady O. speaks to Paula, asking if she and Tanqueray have "made it up." Paula answers that they only speak before others. Lady O. is proudly conscious of her superior social position as the wife of a baronet and tries to advise and patronize Paula. Paula hints that the place must be dull for them. Lady O. is quite satisfied. She is stupid and Paula is plainly bored. Tanqueray and Drummle enter from lawn.

They stop just outside to watch Paula, who is playing the piano; Lady O., who is nodding, and Orreyed, who is fast asleep. They speak of how unhappy Paula looks. Tanqueray speaks of their differences, and that Paula only speaks to him when the Orreyeds are present. Drummle is going to have a talk with Paula, and they plan to get Orreyed and Lady O. out of the room. Tanqueray asks them into the billiard-room, and tells Drummle to bring Paula. Tan., Lady O., and Orreyed exit.

Paula begins playing again. Drummle sits to listen. He speaks of the beauty of the night as one to induce the making-up of her quarrel with her husband. She accuses him of being romantic, and begins to wander around the room. He tells her he is leaving the next day. She shows regret and tells him how she hates the Orreyeds; she realizes she has outgrown their kind. She confesses that she has intercepted some letters from Mrs. C. and Ellean to Tanqueray. She hardly knows why she did it, yet she was jealous that Ellean wrote to her father and not a line to herself. She wonders how she can get them to Tanqueray. He suggests that she will be happier if she gives them into Tanqueray's own hands with the truthful explanation. He says he will send Tanqueray to her at once, and exits.

She tries to call him back, then waits the inevitable explanation. Enter Tanqueray.

She turns her face aside and hands him the letters, telling him she had kept them back. He looks at them then lays them aside, telling her it does not matter. She tells him she supposes he is anxious to open his letters, and starts to go. He has hoped their quarrel is over, but she reminds him that Ellean has not returned. He asks her why she need begrudge Ellean her little happiness. She does not, if it were with another woman. He reminds her that if not Mrs. C., it would have to be someone else, as they are not in a position to introduce her properly. She accuses him of having sent Ellean away to keep her from the contamination of her company. She forces him to confess this is true. This infuriates her, and she lifts her hands as if to strike him. He forces her to sit and listen to him. He tells her

there is one part of her life of which she has never told him, the time when she was like Ellean, and to think of the two Paula's and what kind of friends two such women would have been. She is hurt and angry, but refuses to see the danger, insisting she could be as good a mother to Ellean as her own mother. He tells her she may believe that, but that she is blind; every belief a young girl holds sacred is for her only a joke, he has seen Ellean redden at some risqué story Paula has rattled off unthinkingly in her presence: he is making the only excuse possible for her when he tells her she is blind. She protests that Ellean blushes easily. He says that she too blushed as easily a few years ago. This reaches her and she sinks down, sobbing violently. He tries to soothe her. She becomes calmer, and begs him to get rid of the Orreyeds, and then, when the time comes for Ellean to leave Mrs. C., to give her another chance. Then, shrinking from his advance, she exits.

Tanqueray, alone, sits with his hand covering his face. Servant enters, announcing Mrs. C. and Ellean. They enter at once. Servant exits.

They have not heard from him and are anxious. He remembers, silently, that the letters have not reached him. They have written about a certain subject and he has not answered. Tanqueray takes up the letters. Ellean and Mrs. C. notice that they are unopened. He explains that an accident delayed them. Ellean exits.

Mrs. C. tells Tanqueray that Ellean has come home to stay for a while and explains. In Paris, Ellean has met Hugh Ardale, a brother of a friend of Mrs. C.'s.

Ardale has a reputation as a hero in some affair in India and has won a V. C. He is invalided home, and has become much attached to Ellean and she to him. She had written to him at once, and then not hearing had brought Ellean home to hear what her people thought of it. As Ellean's chaperon she is responsible. He asks about Ardale; she tells him he is in every way worthy. He has come to England with them and is waiting at her house to meet Ellean's family. She starts to go. Re-enter Ellean.

She embraces Mrs. C. affectionately and bids her good-night. Mrs. C. exits.

Ellean tells her father how happy she is. He begs her to be very kind to Paula, and exits, to accompany Mrs. C.

Ellean, alone, turns toward the window. A rose is thrown in. Enter Ardale, a handsome man of about twenty-seven. She is startled, and tells him he ought not to have come that way. He looks upon it rather as a lark. She is angry at his treating her so lightly. He is unhappy and begs her to walk with him in the garden, but she refuses. She hears someone coming, and he goes, telling her he will wait for her. Enter Paula.

She is surprised to see Ellean. Ellean explains that she is to stay home for a while. Her love for Ardale softens her, and she kisses Paula. Paula is deeply touched. Ellean tells her about Ardale, but does not mention his name. She says he is waiting outside, and asks Paula what she had better do. Paula asks her to have him come in, and then she will meet him before Tan-

queray. Reluctantly, Ellean goes to get him. Paula, alone, looks at herself hastily in the mirror.

Re-enter Ellean, followed by Ardale. She introduces them. The two stare at each other. Paula is calm, and tells Ellean that she and Captain Ardale have met before. She tells Ellean she would like to talk with him alone. Ellean nods smilingly, and exits.

The two face each other. She tells him Tanqueray has only gone home with Mrs. C. and will be back soon. What is to be done? The conversation shows that Ardale is one of the men under whose protection she had lived at one time in other days. He asks if her husband knows of him. She says she has never told him of this particular affair. He suggests that they hold their tongues about it. She insists she must tell Tanqueray. He threatens that if she does he will shoot himself, and exits.

Curtain

ACT FOUR

Later the same evening—Paula is still sitting where Ardale left her. Lady O. enters; asks her what is the matter. Asks if she and Tanqueray have made up. Paula says they have. Lady O. is glad and in her common way patronizes her.

Enter Orreyed. He is tipsy. In this mood he always regrets his misalliance and talks of his poor mother, weeping over it, a mood his wife hates. She gets him off to bed.

Enter Drummle. He asks for Tanqueray. Paula tells him he has gone to see Mrs. Cortelyon home. This is

the first information Drummle has had of their return. He asks if Paula and Tan. have made up. She says they have. He goes out.

Enter Tanqueray. He asks if she has seen Ellean. He speaks of the attachment, and the brave things he has heard of Ardale. She tells him suddenly that she has seen Ardale. He is surprised. She reminds him of the letter he burnt on the eve of their wedding. Ardale's name was in that letter. She says she has told Ardale that she must tell her husband. A servant enters with a letter for Paula. It is from Ardale. She hands it to Tanqueray to read. He does so, aloud. Ardale says he will wait in Paris for a message. He asks Paula to invent some excuse for Ellean, and begs her to do what she can for him. Tanqueray tears the letter up. It will not be answered.

Ellean enters. They both start guiltily. Paula exits.

Tanqueray tells Ellean she cannot see Ardale again. She says, if it has to do with his past, she has heard it and has forgiven him because of the lives he saved in India at the risk of his own. Tanqueray says he will say more in the morning. He exits.

Ellean alone. Paula enters. Ellean accuses her of being the one to poison her father against Ardale. Something in Paula's manner and face tell Ellean the truth. She tells Paula she has always known what she was, which is why she has found it so hard to like her. Paula, furious, says it is a lie, and starts to strike Ellean. Tanqueray re-enters.

Ellean says it was her fault, tells her father she never wants to see Ardale again, and exits.

Paula tells him of what Ellean has said to her, that the truth is in her face. They decide they must face things and try to get the suspicion from Ellean's mind. He suggests that Ellean can go back to the convent, and he and Paula will go abroad and begin again. But Paula is too broken to be comforted, and exits.

Enter Drummle. He has heard of the proposed engagement, and says that Ardale has left Mrs. C.'s, and left a note. Drummle seems to think him eligible. Tanqueray breaks out—Ardale has only "led a man's life" and probably he and Drummle have made others suffer as he is suffering now for this "living a man's life." Drummle asks what has happened. Tanqueray tells him that Paula and Ardale were old friends.

Ellean enters, frightened and staggering, telling her father to go at once to Paula. He rushes out.

She tells Drummle that Paula has killed herself. Murmuring that it is her fault, that she should have been kinder, she faints.

Curtain

APPENDIX C

Memorandum of Agreement made and entered into by and between

party of the first part, and

party of the second part.

WHEREBY IT IS AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

1. The party of the first part hereby appoints the party of the second part sole agent for the term of six (6) months from the date of this agreement for the sale of the

(Name of play)

2. The party of the second part undertakes to use her best endeavors to obtain the fullest market, and the party of the first part shall not, during the continuance of this agreement, enter into any contract concerning the above mentioned rights, without the knowledge of the party of the second part.

3. The party of the second part shall not enter into agreements on behalf of the party of the first part or in any way bind the party of the first part, but undertakes to submit to any offer which she may succeed in obtaining as agent for the party of the first part, and no agreement shall be binding on the party of the first part without signature. Should the party of the second part violate this clause, then any agreement so entered into by the party of the second part shall be null and void and her agency shall cease.

4. The party of the second part is hereby authorized to collect the moneys due to the party of the first part under any contract obtained through the efforts of the party of the second part signed by the party of the first part during the continuance of this agreement, and shall deliver all moneys as and when received by her in respect to such contract, together with all documents, accounts, etc., relating thereto, within one week of the receipt of the same, and shall have the right of deducting a

commission of ten per cent from said moneys received, and such commission shall be the sole remuneration of the party of the second part, and she shall not have any claim against the party of the first part for any expenses incurred by her in the course of her agency under this agreement.

5. Should the party of the second part fail in any instance to carry out the provisions of the foregoing clause, this agreement, so far as it deals with the party of the second part's right to collect the moneys due, shall be at an end, and the party of the second part, as and from the date of such failure and default, shall not be entitled to claim or deduct any further sum by way of commission.

6. At the end of such period as may be decided in clause one hereof, either party to this agreement may terminate the same by thirty days notice in writing.

7. Upon the termination of this agreement the party of the second part shall have no claim whatever upon the party of the first part for any commission except in respect to contracts signed by the party of the first part prior to such termination.

8. This contract shall be binding upon heirs, legal representatives, and assigns of the respective parties hereto.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF we have hereunto set our hands and seals this

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following list is merely suggestive, and is by no means complete. You will find the titles grouped. The first group touches more directly on the theories of play-construction. The second deals more especially with the drama itself, its conditions past and present. The third touches particularly on the dramatist and his personality; the fourth is a group of very interesting critical essays and reviews collected by their authors under the various titles given. Next you will find the three books on copyright, then three books which can be recommended to the writer in any field. Last on the list is a very excellent work giving the thirty-six possible dramatic plots. I do not know that the book has been translated; if you read French at all, its perusal will be most profitable.

In addition, there are many magazine articles of the first order which may be found by consulting Poole's Index, or any other index of the kind. Several of the best magazines have dramatic departments, in charge of such writers as Clayton Hamilton, Walter Pritchard Eaton, Burns Mantle, Channing Pollock, and others, with occasional articles from men and women whose opinions are worthy of attention if not always agreement.

Play-making ..... William Archer
How to See a Play ..... Richard Burton
The Appreciation of the Drama ..... Charles H. Caffin
How to Appreciate the Drama ..... Thomas Littlefield Marble
A Study of the Drama ... Brander Matthews
The Study of the Stage ... Brander Matthews
Drama: Encyclopedia Britannica ..... Sir Adolphus William Ward

The Influence of the Drama. Granville Forbes Sturgis
The Modern Drama ..... Ludwig Lewisohn
The American Stage of To-day ..... Walter Pritchard Eaton
The Theatre of To-day ... Hiram Kelly Moderwell
The New American Drama. Richard Burton
The New Movement in the Theatre ..... Sheldon Cheney
The Play of To-day ..... Elizabeth R. Hunt
Aspects of Modern Drama. Frank Wadleigh Chandler
The Drama of To-day .... Charlton Andrews
The Romance of the American Theatre ..... Mary Caroline Crawford
Plays of Our Forefathers.. Charles Miles Gayley

Modern Dramatists ..... Ashley Dukes
Dramatists of To-day ..... Edward Everett Hale, Jr.
Iconoclasts ..... James Huneker
Sardou and the Sardou Plays ..... Jerome A. Hart
The French Dramatists.... Brander Matthews
The American Dramatist .. Montrose J. Moses
Ibsen ..... Montrose J. Moses
The Quintessence of Ibsenism ..... Bernard Shaw
The True Adventures of a Play ..... Louis Evans Shipman

About the Theatre ..... William Archer
Study and Stage ..... William Archer
The Theory of the Theatre. Clayton Hamilton
Studies in Stagecraft..... Clayton Hamilton
The Foundations of a National Drama ..... Henry Arthur Jones
The Playhouse and the Play ..... Percy Mackaye
Drama and Life ..... A. B. Walkley

Copyright: Its History and Its Law ..... Richard Rogers Bowker
Playright and Copyright in All Countries ..... Colles and Hardy
The Law of Copyright .... J. B. Richardson

English Composition ..... Barrett Wendell
Talks on Writing ..... Arlo Bates
The Making of Arguments.. J. H. Gardiner

Les Trente-six Situations Dramatique ..... Georges Polti

Following is a list of published plays which illustrate certain points brought up from time to time in the course of this work. In addition to this list, read the works of other dramatists, especially those mentioned in Chapter III, and such translations of the foreign writers' plays as you can find. These will suggest themselves during your other reading and study.

Milestones ..... Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblauch
To illustrate point in Chapter V.
Mary Jane's Pa ..... Edith Ellis
Original and modern type of so-called "rural" play.

The New Sin ..... Basil Macdonald Hastings
Good example of the use of the confidant. A play without a woman or a love-affair. An additional act, the fourth, was added for production in New York. Chapter VIII.

The Mollusc ..... Hubert Henry Davies

As a Man Thinks ..... Augustus Thomas
The two preceding in Chapter VIII.

The World and His Wife (a free adaptation of Echegaray's *El Gran Galeotto*) ..... Chas. F. Nirdlinger
An excellent example of the starting and working out of a dramatic situation, except for one soliloquy in Act 2, which could have been handled in another way. Chapter XI.

The Thief ..... Henri Bernstein

Mrs. Dane's Defense ..... Henry Arthur Jones
These two plays give ideal examples of long dramatic dialogue between two people only. Chapter XIII.

The Terrible Meek ..... Charles Rann Kennedy
See Chapter XV.

Disraeli ..... Louis N. Parker

The Importance of Being Earnest ..... Oscar Wilde
See Chapter XVII for these two plays.

Joseph and His Brethren. Louis N. Parker
See Chapter XXI.

The Yellow Jacket ..... Benrimo and Hazelton
A different and unusual play. Chapter XXI.

The Blue Bird ..... Maurice Maeterlinck
Allegorical. Chapter XXI.

Tiger ..... Witter Bynner
Modern play told in blank verse. Chapter XXI.

The Arrow Maker ..... Mary Austin

The Scarecrow ..... Percy Mackaye

The Man from Home .... Tarkington and Wilson
The Fortune Hunter ..... Winchell Smith
The two preceding plays are successful examples of the "heart interest" type of play as distinguished from the so-called psychological drama. See Chapters XI and XII for first of these.
The Amazons ..... A. W. Pinero
The Fascinating Mr. Vandervelt ..... Alfred Sutro
Cousin Kate ..... Hubert Henry Davies
Three examples of pure comedy. Last play mentioned in Chapter XI.
Baby Mine ..... Margaret Mayo
A successful farce which, in the opinion of some, erred in having a note of tragedy in the undercurrent.
Ghosts ..... Ibsen
Kindling ..... Charles Kenyon
Two examples of the sociological and propaganda play, widely different in theme and treatment. The latter is mentioned in Chapter XII for two points in construction.
The Nigger ..... Edward Sheldon
The Second Mrs. Tanqueray A. W. Pinero
The two plays analyzed in Appendix A and B.
Romance ..... Edward Sheldon
Fanny's First Play ..... Bernard Shaw
Examples of the play within a play. The latter illustrates a point in Chapter VII.
Chief Contemporary Dramatists ..... Edited by Thos. H. Dickinson
A collection of twenty representative plays by as many representative dramatists of the present day.

In addition, following is a short list of good one-act plays, to be read in connection with those mentioned in Chapter XXII.

Carrots	Alfred Sutro, translated from the French.
War-Brides	Marion Craig Wentworth
Across the Border	Beulah Marie Dix
Happiness, and other Plays	J. Hartley Manners
Possession, " " "	George Middleton
Embers, " " "	George Middleton
Tradition, " " "	George Middleton

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In most instances, the references are to concrete words and phrases. In some cases, however, the reference points to something of which the word in the INDEX is the expression. For instance: *Psychology* in the INDEX may not be found as a word on every page listed under that heading; but some psychological aspect of the subject will be noted on that page.

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